



By The Time You Read This by halfempty

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Summary:

Billy leaves Hawkins one autumn night without a word of explanation. Eight years later, he sends Steve a letter.

1. Part One

Notes for the Chapter:

For my lovely lovely friend, [desfinado](#).

This story was like a bug in my brain; I had to get it out. It's not the usual format that I write in so I hope it's still enjoyable. It's not remotely connected to my other works, aside from a couple of tropes that I like.

If we go by the show's canon (I don't like to do that, do I?), Billy was 17 in season two (1984) and Steve was 18. This story is set 11 years later in 1995. Billy is 28 and Steve is 29 / turning 30.

Strikethroughs are representative of something that's been scribbled over but is still maaaaybe legible if you squint hard. The dates are when the letters are mailed out, not necessarily written on; let's say they take 2-3 days to arrive (maybe more for dramatic purposes!).

By the Time You Read This

by halfempty

Part One

To: Steve Harrington
1804 Fourth Ave
Richmond Indiana 47375

August 31st, 1995

Steve,

I feel kinda nervous sending you this letter. I'm not sure if you're even going to read it or if you're just going to toss it straight into the trash. I wouldn't blame you if you did that. But I had to try and get in touch with you.

It was really nice to see you last month. I heard about you over the years from Max and Susan so I knew you were doing okay for yourself. Never thought I'd run into you at the shopping mall of all places. Dunno if Max told you we were shoppin for her mom's birthday. Susan's turning forty-five so I came back for the big bash.

So I won't write too much in case this letter ends up in your trash can. I just can't believe I saw you and I was thinkin about you. I've been wondering for a long time how you were and all. I'm sorry about how we left things. I got your address off of Max who made it into a big two-step process getting it off of her mom and then Mrs. Wheeler.

Anyway you can write me back if you want or feel like it. I'd love to talk to ya or write letters to ya. That's my home address on the envelope.

I sure hope you're doing good. I hope it's okay that I wrote to you. If I don't hear back I'll know it's not.

Billy Hargrove

To: Billy Hargrove
290 Evergreen Dr APT 2C
Stanwood WA 98292

September 10th, 1995

Billy,

No I didn't throw your letter out. I was surprised as hell to see your name show up in my mail box though.

It's nice to hear from you. Really. I kinda never thought you'd come home. I couldn't believe it when I saw you last month. Max told me

before you lived near Seattle now, how'd you end up there?

Sure we can write letters. You know I probably won't be much good at it. *I wanted to* I wondered how you were. I see Max around sometimes during the summer when I come around to visit. I still talk to Dustin and he said she's doing really good. Can't believe she's starting grad school.

I haven't written a real letter in a long time. Sorry my handwriting's so bad, my boss complains about it too. We got computers at my job and I have to use one at home too so I usually do emails now. Letters are okay though. I don't really know what to write about though. I'll think of more stuff next time. Tell me about how you are or what you've been up to.

It was nice to see you too.

Steve

September 18th, 1995

Hey Steve

I'm real happy to hear from you. I wasn't really sure if you'd wanna talk to me after how we left it but I figured I'd give it a shot. Glad you ain't mad at me anymore. Or maybe you are. It's ok if you are but thanks for writing me.

Your handwriting's ok, I'm sure mine's just as bad. I don't got a computer or nothin. Max wanted me to get an email like a year ago, said it'd be easier. She came out here last year to see me and got me set up at the library. Mostly yelled at me for being so inept so I yelled back and we got into a fuss. The librarian thought we was in a domestic dispute and I haven't been back there to show my face since. My typing's real bad too. I can figure it out if you want.

I've been living in Washington for about four years now I guess. Almost five, feels crazy. Not really sure how I ended up out here. I had some friends who moved up here from Cali I guess. It's cold and it rains a lot. Pretty though. I don't live in Seattle but nearby. Kinda

out in the woods but near the beach too. I dunno if you've heard of Camano Island, but I'm pretty close to there. It's nicer than Seattle in my opinion.

I don't really know what to say about myself so tell me about you. Lemme see. I don't really do anything too exciting anymore. Like I said, I live in the fuckin woods. I got two shitty jobs and a little mangy dog. I'm not really supposed to have a dog at my apartment but the landlady likes me. Name's Buster. The dog, not the landlady. That's a stupid name but I didn't pick it. I got him off one'a my old neighbors when I lived in San Fran for a bit. He likes car rides. The dog, not the neighbor. Billy and Buster, sounds like a sitcom on the TV. Ok I'm done.

Tell me about you, what you been doing? Max talks about you sometimes but I guess you ain't really around no more.

Sometimes I get letters or postcards from Will Byers. I guess that's how I got the idea to write you a letter. If you got a computer at your job it must be real fancy, what did you end up doing? Did you ever get married or what?

Hope you're doing okay. Glad you wrote me back. Thanks.

Billy

September 27th, 1995

Hey Billy,

Don't worry about the email, writing's fine. It's kind of fun to send out a letter. I don't think I ever really wrote anyone before. I'm glad to hear from you too.

Everything that happened between us was a really long time ago so don't worry about it. I was mad before but what's that going to We were just kids then anyway right. It's okay. We don't even have to talk about it.

I heard it rains a lot in Seattle. Is it raining there now? I didn't know

you lived in San Francisco before. I've never heard of Camano Island, what's it like?

You're still pretty funny. Your description of the dog made me laugh. What kind of dog do you have? I'm picturing you with a pomeranian and it's really good. You always let Max boss you around so I'm surprised you don't use the email for her. How is she really, do you talk to her a lot? I didn't know that Will knew where you were either, what do you guys talk about? What jobs do you have?

Sorry, I guess that's a lot of questions. You don't have to answer them all. I still don't know what to write. I don't really do anything exciting anymore either. I go out drinking with my coworkers or friends a couple times a month.

Well, you asked about my job, so I guess I can tell you about my job. I got a schmaltzy desk job like you always joked about. I started working at an architecture firm pretty soon after you left I guess about when I was 22 or so. My dad got me the job of course. But I'm at a new place now for the last three years and it's nice. Everyone there's cool, younger people. I was mostly a paper-pusher at first, but I get to do stuff now and I got my own office. It barely fits my desk. I'm not a hot shot or anything but maybe in like 15 years when I'm 45 or something. I helped draw up the plans for that big reservoir and the dam they're going to build out in Two Forks. That probably sounds really boring. Sometimes I work really long hours and it is really boring. I want a dog too but I don't really have the time for one. Sorry this is probably boring.

What else. No, I'm not married. I'm not even close to married. I haven't wanted to get invol I haven't even dated anyone in almost a whole year actually. My job keeps me really busy. That's pretty sad. What about you, did you get married or what?

I guess this got pretty long after all. Sorry about that.

Steve

October 5th, 1996

Harrington,

First of all my dog is not a Pomeranian. That's a fucked up thing to say. He's just a mutt, some wirehair mix. He's real old. Probably like twelve or something. Don't know if it's weird but here's a picture of him. He's pretty cool. He's a good guard dog even though he's about the size of a city rat.

Second of all Max don't boss me around – no one does. I don't know what you're talking about. Well she was pretty pissed at me when I took off for a while but I guess we've been good the last couple years. Did you hear that her mom finally left my old man? Good for her.

I talk to Max about once a month. I'm still bad at callin back and it gets her pissed off at me. I work weird hours so I ain't never around when she calls. That's why I came out to see her this August I guess. She took me around her school. She's doing ok, I talked to her more this year I guess because she was going through it with that fuckin boyfriend of hers. Really Sinclair was probably the only decent guy she ever went around with. I don't know if you heard bout all the drama with that rich boy she got involved with out in Lawrenceville. I almost fuckin flew out there to string his intestines around his neck. Anyway I'm spillin all her business. Sorry Max.

Can't believe how grown up she is now. I still remember that summer when she had to retake her math class. What a brat.

I didn't expect to see you over the summer. I usually go back about once a year to see my family Max and Sue but I heard you don't live in Hawkins anymore. It was crazy to see you. You looked really good, is it okay to say that. It's been a long time.

I talk to Will too about once a month I guess. Not calls but he writes me. I guess he wouldn't have told you. We have a lot in common what with being fairies and all. I never thought he'd turn out gay. I lived in Cali for a while and San Fran for about two years but it was real expensive. I saw Byers a couple times when he went to school out there. You still talk to any of the brats aside from Henderson?

Camano Island's nice but pretty pricey. You can see the mountains and the ocean and shit. It's like a real island and all. If I had more

money I'd live out there. Lotsa ritzy artists up in that area.

Your job sounds good and not boring at all. You still say sorry too much. That's really great for you, I always knew you'd do something big like that. I don't know much about that shit but I think it's fucking cool that you got to design a dam and all that stuff. Is that what you guys do, do you build houses too or just fancy bridges and buildings?

I work at a big car garage about twenty minutes out of the city. Pays pretty good and I like it. First time I ever had health insurance. I work some nights at a restaurant too near my place. Rent's not bad here but I like to have some extra cash. Most of my friends I know from there.

You're real funny too. I'm not married Steve, they don't let faggots do that. I haven't been on a date in a year either. Maybe a hookup or two but that's not really the same. I'm tired of You know me I'm still not really a people person.

It is raining here as I write this. Do you remember when we went camping with the kids and it fucking rained the whole time. And you and me went swimming anyway and got sick for two weeks after. It's a downpour here like that weekend. I dunno why I remember that weekend so well.

I guess this is long enough. You said I could write you so I send a fuckin novel. It's nice to talk to you. Well write. Whatever. Thanks for writin me.

Billy

October 25th, 1995

Hey Bill,

Sorry it took me so long to get back to you. We got two new clients at my job and it's been totally crazy. I wanted to write earlier. Well I'm sure you weren't waiting on bated breath for a letter from me. I don't mind getting a novel from you.

I don't know if you remember that I have that dyslexia thing. Sometimes it takes me about a million years to go through all of my paperwork. Anyway I won't talk about my job because it's boring.

I got a 'Harrington' instead of a 'Steve' at the top of that last letter, I must have made you mad! I'm sorry for insunia implying that you would ever have a pomeranian. Buster looks like a cool dude. He's got two different color eyes! And Jesus that is some couch, please tell me that's your couch.

That's cool that you still talk to Will. I don't really see him too much so I wouldn't know I guess. I do remember that he moved out to Cali for school.

Yeah I actually do still hang out with Dustin. He's calmed down a little but is still mostly annoying as hell. It's his first year being a teacher and I'm sorry for his students. I see Mike around sometimes, Nancy too, but just at like Christmastime when the families do that big get-together.

Hey – I never actually knew that you were gay, Bill. I guess we never really talked about it that much somehow. I didn't mean anything by the marriage thing. Sorry. Really. I thought maybe you'd have met someone. I always figured maybe you had met someone and that's why you left or something.

I can't picture you working at a restaurant. Are you a waiter? I can't see it. I figured you would end up doing something with cars.

Ha! I remember Max in summer school too. Funny how she was supposed to be at class but she always managed to bust in on us. I forgot to ask, do you still take pictures?

I remember that weekend too. I remember we looked at the stars on our last night out there when it finally stopped raining. And then Dustin puked the whole way home because we let him have half a cigarette. Romantic. Do you still smoke?

I feel like I should say more but I guess this is long enough. I worked 14 hours today but I guess that's normal for you since you got two jobs. I just wanted to be able to send this out before I get too

swamped at work again. Tell me more about your job or your dog, he looks totally cool. The 'city rat' thing made me laugh a lot.

Hope you're doing okay.

Steve

2. Part Two

Part Two

November 4th, 1995

Hey Steve

Don't worry about writing to me every week or nothin. You don't have to apologize for sending something out late. I actually was waiting on your letter but that says somethin about me and not you. I'm glad you didn't get freaked out by me mentionin the lake or anything.

Do you got a problem with my couch? What's wrong with it? It's a good couch.

Sorry your work's been so crazy. I guess with the holidays coming up it will keep being crazy. I hope you're doing okay. Tell me more about your job if you want, I wanna hear about it. And of course I remember that you've got dyslexia. Thought you were gonna pop me in the face back in the day when I said you might have it.

Well I've been busy with work too so I don't have anything too exciting to say. I dunno how much you want to hear about my jobs. First off no I'm not a fucking waiter, I'm a cook actually. It's not real fancy or anything, it's like a fish and chips place, sandwiches and stuff. It's nice though. I kinda like it more than the autobody shop on account of I get to talk to more people. My boss there is great though, at the shop. The restaurant was only supposed to be a temporary gig to help out my friend Daria who works there but I've been there for about two years now. Daria's like my best pal around here, aside from my stupid dog. She's a good girl. Daria, not the dog (he's an asshole).

I didn't meet somebody else. That's not why I left Hawkins. I can't expl I'm sorry that I left like I did and I'm sorry if it made you think that. I'm sorry. I didn't meet somebody else. I know everything was a real long time ago but I just want you to know that.

I do still take pictures actually. Can't you tell from the angle and the artistic pile of dirty laundry in the shot I sent ya, that was placed there purposefully. Ha ha. That's just a Polaroid but I got a fancy camera too. A Nikon, was probably the most expensive shit I ever bought myself. I don't really do too much with it though.

I'm dead tired right now but I wanted to write you back. Hope you don't mind me yammerin on like a girl.

Okay but if we keep writing to each other I'm gonna need you to quit sayin sorry all the time. The last thing you need to be doing is sayin sorry to me. I really thought you knew I was queer. I thought I made that pretty clear back when we was in junior college together but I guess you're right and we never really talked about it. Seems crazy now. I always figured you were doin' a one-off with me or somethin. I really thought you'd be married by now. I never wanted to leave it like that I dunno if you want to talk about all that so ignore me.

What else. You wanna hear about my dog? He's a piece of shit, you're lucky you don't have a dog. I'm probably too busy for one too but he's an old fuck now so he don't need much attention. I wasn't even gonna take him but my friend needed me to take him. He was movin so. I try out all my new fancy dinner dishes on him. The dog, not my friend.

Yeah I still smoke, not as much as I used to though. Mostly when I'm drinking. What about you? I will never forget Henderson's face when he took a huge drag off that 100 like he was real tough. It was so good, I dream about it. He turned fuckin GREEN! I remember those stars too, I also remember you bitching your head off and snottin on me for two weeks after.

Write me back when you can or when you want to. Don't worry about it.

Billy

November 10th, 1995

Hey Billy,

Well it was really nice to hear back from you so fast. My job is going okay again but they wanted to pull me in on a project last minute and it was a lot. I like working at the firm and I like the long hours. It's not bad or nothing. I dunno if you remember this about me but I tend to not do so WELL under pressure. But we've got everything worked out okay now.

I forgot to answer a couple of things in the last letter. This might get pretty long so I hope that's okay.

I looked up Camano Island and it looks real nice. I can't believe you live out there. I never thought too much about Washington but I guess it's really beautiful. I did move outside of Hawkins but I'm still not too far from Indianapolis. Richmond is kind of a city too, I don't know if you remember when we went there. It's mostly just trees though. I've still never been anywhere.

You know I forgot to say this before too, how the hell did Susan only turn 45 this summer?! That's crazy. I forgot your dad is so much older. And I forgot to say that yeah I heard about him and Susan getting divorced a couple years ago. Good riddance. I remember when you left he was such a Do you talk to him at all now?

I didn't hear anything about Max having a shitty boyfriend. Is she okay, what happened with that?

My job is a commercial firm so we mostly do buildings. It's kind of a startup company so we haven't done too much yet. I get paid a little less than at my old place but it's really nice not to be under my old man's thumb anymore. It's about time, right? My dream one day is to design a high-rise or something. Maybe that sounds silly.

It's nice that you still take pictures. You were really good. I still have some of us from that one summer. If you have more you can spare, send them.

You're really breaking my heart telling me about your dog being an asshole. You never said what makes him an asshole though. Sorry that your friend moved and couldn't keep him. If I had an older dog I

don't think I could get rid of him. How did you meet your friend Daria, is she one of the people you knew from San Francisco?

I wasn't I never I wasn't having a one-off with you. I think I figured maybe you liked both like I did. I've been with girls and guys since you. Okay mostly girls but you know. Why did you To me I guess its more about the person and not the equipment.

I was pretty messed up when you left but we don't have to talk about it. I was mad for a long time and then Max would never really tell me anything about you so I was even madder. I can't believe it's been eight years since you we've really seen each other. There's no use being mad anymore, huh? I thought you and me were real good for a while. But I'm not mad anymore. I always wanted always thought if I could I'd wanna see you again. So I'm glad that you wrote to me.

I'm not sure why you think I'd be married. Like I said I haven't been on a date in a year. If you want the truth it's probably been longer than that. I was with this one girl for a few years but it didn't work out. I don't really feel like writing about that though.

I don't really smoke anymore. Maybe if I'm at the bar and a friend gives me a light. My mom had a stroke about two years ago and I came back to Hawkins for a couple months to take care of her. We quit smoking together. I was probably not so pleasant to be around while this was going on.

I like hearing about your jobs and stuff. The restaurant sounds great for you. I remember you always used to cook for me and Max. Also, ha ha, Dustin still talks about that cigarette too. He talked about it just last month actually. I guess Max told him that we were talking, he asked how you were. I'm not mad that you brought up the lake. I do not remember snotting on you, I think you're exaggerating. Mostly I remember that tent we had. Fun stuff.

Oh and there's nothing wrong with your couch! It's ... really red. I've never seen stripes like that before. Wow.

I also forgot to say that you looked good too when I saw you. Do you always keep your hair short now?

From,

Steve

November 16th, 1995

Jesus Steve I'm real sorry. I didn't know that about your mom. I hope she's okay now. That got me feeling all kinds of awful for days. I hope she's okay. You know I always liked your mom a whole bunch. Shit. I'm really sorry.

Well Max would kill me for blabbin on about her business but this older guy she dated for a while was a real prick. There's something about the Mayfield women, they just go totally batshit for any guy who treats em like total crap I guess. I don't really wanna say too much since it ain't my place. She finally chucked him for good a couple months ago, well so she says. I guess we'll see.

Hey Steve I'm glad that you're not mad at me no more. Like I said I didn't even think you'd answer my letter. It means a lot to me that you did. You know, I feel like I've been talking to you more in these letters the last two months than I ever did when we were together. That's my fault too. I wish I could tell you why I wish I could explain more about back then but I can't. I guess I just needed to get out of Hawkins. It wasn't you. You were the only good thing there for me.

Well you know what I lied to you in my last letter and I don't want to do that. I didn't get my dog because my friend moved away. My friend was this older guy named Jay. He was like forty-something I guess. He didn't move away, he got sick from AIDS and died. He was queer too but I didn't fuck him or nothing. The older fags it seems like if they're not trying to fuck you they take you under their wing I guess. He was the first person I talked to in San Fran and I didn't know nobody. He was a nice guy, like the only nice guy I knew. But he got real sick real fast and died. These people trashed his place and I had to take the dog, Buster. I mean I didn't have to but no one else was gonna so I took the dog. I was real scared for a while because after you and I split I wasn't exactly careful with who I was bein with if you know what I mean. That probably grosses you out or pisses you

off to read that. Sorry. I was fucked up and stupid. But I got real lucky and I don't have nothin.

I guess that's why I moved out to Washington too. I lied about that too, I'm sorry. I didn't follow any of my friends out here. I did know two people who lived out in Seattle but they weren't close pals or nothin. I felt fucked up and I had to get out of the city. Just gave notice at my job, dumped the dog in the car, started driving. I knew I couldn't go back east to y so I drove north and then I ended up in Washington and I found my place. Then I got my job and my other job and here I still am.

This whole fuckin letter's a downer so far so let me try to write about something else. You asked me about my friend Daria and about why my dog's an asshole. I'll talk about the dog first because it'll get me pissed off and then I can write some nice shit at the end.

First of all he's kind of like a cat, he don't like bein petted too much. He'll let you pat him for a couple minutes and then when he gets tired of you he'll snip at you or just fuckin walk away like he's too cool for school. When I first took him he pissed in my bed for three nights in a row. He probably missed Jay, I know I did. I didn't piss the bed over it though. My dog also has real bad gas, but only on the VERY RARE OCCASION that I fucking bring a guy around. He eats socks all the time, it doesn't matter if they're clean or dirty. I have to buy new socks about every fuckin month. They know me at the general store, there's that flashy faggot buying more ankle socks. My life is so exciting, Steve.

Daria's my best friend around here though that sounds so fuckin lame to say. Sounds like I'm 12 or something. I never really had a best friend before. I think you were the closest thing. I don't know her from California - met her a couple months after I moved out here. There's a long story about how I met her that's boring and not real funny. Okay so Daria works at the diner with me but she's also an actual artist, like she does these real great paintings and she actually makes decent money off of 'em. I'd take a picture of one of her paintings for you but she'd fuckin murder me with an ax for 'messing up her medium.' She has a lotta artsy friends and a lotta faggot friends, some artsy faggot friends too. She's not gay though. And she's real put together because she's got a kid and all. Do you believe I've

even babysat like five times in my life.

This got really long. I probably shouldn't even send this. I'm sorry if it brought you down or freaked you out. I'll send you some more pictures next time.

I remember the tent too and I remember goin to Richmond. I remember a lot of the places you took me. I seem to remember Max screaming her head off at us in that fancy art museum in Richmond, do you live near there now? And yeah I usually keep my hair short. It's easier for work even though my ears stick out like Dumbo.

Tell me more about your job or your friends. Tell me about the high-rise you wanna design, you got any drawings? I haven't talked to you in eight years, I wanna know everything.

Yours,

Billy

November 20th, 1995

Hey Bill!

God, I'm really sorry for dropping that stuff about my mom on you like that. I wasn't thinking about how you'd take it. I know that you're still I should have said some more stuff. Sorry again. My mom's completely fine. It was pretty scary but she's young and it was a small stroke. She's totally recovered. It wasn't like the smoking caused it or anything but I guess doin that doesn't help so we quit together. I guess it made it easier for her. I miss smoking.

Sorry again. I wasn't thinking when I wrote that. You know that my mom always liked you too, right? Do you remember that night when she busted in on us smoking a joint in my room? I saw my life flash before my eyes. I saw it ending, too. Then somehow you got her out on the roof with us smoking. My own mom, a stoner. That was probably the best night of my life, Ha Ha. Well, one of them. It's funny that you say you're not a people person, because I remember people loving being all over you.

Bill I just want to say I'm really sorry about your friend. All of that sounds so horrible. I guess I don't really know what to say about it. I'm glad you got the dog though. It must have been real terrible for you to go through all that. I can't imagine how something like that must have been.

And you didn't freak me out or make me mad or anything so don't feel sorry. You can do whatever you want. I guess when we started writing these letters I hoped maybe we could at least be friends again and I hope we are now. I guess despite what happened between us I still want us to be friends. I don't want you to feel like You can tell me anything you want. You were the best thing around here for me too. I just don't understand if you said it wasn't me then

I figured you'd remember about my dyslexia. You know they actually have a test for it and stuff now. I usually do ok nowadays, I've got some tricks to help me focus and remember stuff. I'm probably not so good at writing these letters but I'm trying not to make a lot of spelling mistakes. I hope you appreciate it!

I know you got your dog under not that great circumstances but what you wrote about him made me laugh again. I'm really still not so great at reading. Sometimes I don't get context right away but your letters always make me laugh. I probably look like an idiot sittin in my house. You always had this way of talkin. I also noticed that you put a big emphasis on the VERY RARE OCCASIONS that you bring home dates which is funny to me. You can tell me if you have boyfriends or something. We haven't been together in I'm not going to get jealous over it, I promise.

I don't really know what all to say about my job. Not that I think you're dumb or that you wouldn't understand but most of it is a lot of papers and technical stuff like zoning rights and it's boring to talk about. I'm pretty friendly with most of my coworkers and I dated this girl who works in the same business complex for two years. Melissa. I think the most we had in common was having two boring jobs. There's like five other people in the office that I'm cool with and we usually go out to the bar on weekends. Probably one of my closest friends is still Dustin if you can believe that. He's a nightmare when he gets drunk or if he even looks at a bottle of booze though.

Your friend Daria sounds real great. I don't know any people like that. Artsy people I guess. You can tell me the long boring story of how you met if you want, I'd like to hear it. I actually can picture you babysitting. How old's her kid? Did you hear that Mike and El had a baby? Real cute girl with curly hair, I think she'll be one soon. Little kids like that kind of scare me. Their heads are so big and still soft for like forever. I'll start off with a dog, thanks.

I'd like some more pictures if you have some. Max screaming at us sounds familiar. She was a good cover for us wasn't she? I don't remember your ears sticking out so I might need evidence. Do you remember how you used to call me Bambi

Well I'm sending this out in the morning before I get to work. Here's hoping you have a good holiday if you get this before that. Tell me if you did anything for it in your next letter.

I'm not going to be home for Thanksgiving because we're starting a new project at my job. This afternoon three of us get to fly out to a big city in Idaho to look at the site. It's real exciting because I've never been out there. I can see your face and hear you sayin something smart like 'Do they have cities in Idaho.' Surprise, I think they do! Only one or two.

Happy Thanksgiving, Bill. Do you think you'll come around for Christmas this year?

About to be late for work,

Steve

3. Part Three

December 1st, 1995

Steve,

Hey thanks for getting back to me so fast. I'm sorry that I kinda flipped out in my last message and made some big shit out of the thing with your mom. You prolly think I'm a crazy person. I'm glad she's ok and all. Of course I remember smoking with your mom. Jesus Christ help me, that was like the best night of my life too. Your mom is such a trip. You know she always had me come inside and sit down with her when I'd come by and you'd be at class or something. I remember I was scared to come around after she found out about us but she was always real cool with me. Your fuckin dad on the other hand

Thanks for sayin sorry about my friend and for sayin all those nice things to me. That means a lot to me. I didn't need to tell you all that crazy shit, sorry about that. But I guess I wanna say that I didn't really go through nothin. Shit was just happenin around me. It's not like it happened to me, you know? I don't need to go on about it. And for what it's worth I wanna be friends too. I'm really glad we're writin to each other.

You know you were always so nice to me even when I didn't deserve it. You always knew how to make me feel good back when I'd get into a mood about missing my mom or my old man beatin on me or whatever. You're still a real sweetheart.

Well it turns out I did actually get your last letter the day after Thanksgiving. Thanks for sendin it out to me. I'm writing back to you right away too, but I prolly won't get to mail it out til the next week. I wanna send you some pictures so you get to get a big flashy envelope from the post office.

You're a real funny guy, Mr Smartass. I bet there's about three cities in Idaho really. I would bet these 'cities' consist of maybe a gas

station and a potato field. No I'm joking. I think that sounds really neat that you get to go out there. Did you fly first class, please tell me you flew first class. Did you stay in a fancy hotel? I love a fancy hotel. I hope you have a good time out there. What are you gonna be building?

Another thing. I notice that you always call your job really boring when you write me these letters. But you also tell me that you like your job and you like what ya do there. And you seem to be pretty good at it since you got your own office. So if you like it and you're good at it, it's not boring okay? Does that sound like some solid logic to you? I'm gonna need you to stop talking like you're fucking boring all the time, man. You always did that I dunno what zoning rights are but I bet I'd think they were the most interesting thing in the world if it was you telling me about em.

I didn't do anything fancy for Thanksgiving, I ain't got a real family out here aside from Daria and her kid. I just worked all day. Actually it wasn't really work I guess I should say. This is probably gonna sound kinda lame. But the place I cook at with my girl Daria does this charity thing for most holidays. We cook for homeless people and serve 'em so they can feel like they're havin a real Thanksgiving or whatever and so they can sit down and have a meal. It's put on by a buncha queer folks because you know we're all bleeding hearts out here. We got a lot of donations this year so it was pretty fuckin cool. We had like four turkeys and they all got eaten, was like rush hour all day. And before you ask yes I cooked the turkeys. Well I helped cause there were like four of us cooking.

Bet you can't see me doing something like that. I hope you don't think it's too funny. I ain't never actually been out on the street but I've been pretty close. So I feel good doin something like that if I can.

Anyway so I'm actually at my friend Daria's place right now. She gave me this fancy stationary to write you on, do ya like it? I told her I was writin somebody and she's acting like I took out a personal ad. She thinks I'm real hysterical. Sometimes I crash out at her apartment on the weekend if I'm feeling down or when she works early on Saturday mornings so she ain't gotta run around in the morning to take her kid to the babysitter. Her kid is gonna be five in the spring and his name's Gabriel. I don't care bout kids too much either but he

cracks my shit up, he's real serious. His best quality is bein awesome at Legos.

I did hear about Mike and El having a baby. Max went off like how she does about how she can't believe Wheeler actually procreated, cracked my shit up. What also cracked my shit up was you sayin in your last letter that kids' heads are squishy for forever. I remember when Daria's kid was about two his head looked like an egg. I always thought he was gonna topple over.

Well the story about how I met her isn't real exciting or anything. I hope you don't mind that this is getting pretty long. But I do have three pages of this fancy stationary I don't wanna waste. I forget what the hell was wrong with my car that time, but I was goin' down to take the subway somewhere and there was this girl holdin her kid and all her bags. They were stuck at the turnstyle because her pass had ran out of money. I said hey no problem let me swipe you in and she said thanks so much. So I swiped her in and then if you can believe it my dumb ass got stuck because my pass ran out of money too. Anyway you know me, I just hopped right over the gate. This guard chased us right down to the platform yelling his head off but we got onto the F Train right ahead of him. Then she brought me down to the diner she works at to get me breakfast because she felt bad for making me run. I watched her kid at the counter while she had one of her managers' meetings. Mind you lookin at the kid's squishy head made me real nervous but I never turn down food. Later she says it was probably the dumbest thing she ever did, lettin me watch her kid. I said why, because I could have taken off with him like a child rapist? And she said 'No because now I have to deal with you all the time.' She's a riot.

Well that's that I guess. Unfortunately for you I don't really got any pictures of myself so you don't get to laugh at my ears or my dumb haircut. I think Daria's got some photos of me, but when I asked her for one she started up with her twenty questions and all so I said no no no nevermind. But she pulled out these shots for me – I forgot she kept so much of the old pictures I took. I don't really do too much with my camera anymore.

This place out here is called Cama Beach, it's on the island. I went out there with a buncha queens like two years ago. It's real nice, you can

get a cabin that looks out on the water. They got a cafe that serves breakfast and shit too. I keep talkin about breakfast. There's a lotta state parks in WA, I remember you like doin stuff like that. Do you still go camping and all?

You know I wanted to ask you. I know I don't exactly write in proper English, so is it hard to read my letters with your dyslexia and all? I can try to write in, I don't know, a better way if it makes it easier for you. Also you mentioned sitting in your house, did you get an actual house?? Tell me about it.

Hey Steve you're funny, I think you can use context just fine! I don't have any boyfriends to tell you about though, sorry. I don't really go out with a lot of people no more. I dated this guy named Paul for about a year but he wasn't what I it didn't work out with us. I guess it ended bad. Since then I haven't been with anybody. I brought this one guy home maybe in like July but if you believe it he just fuckin fell asleep on my couch. This made my dog very upset since that's his spot. It's I'm You know when you meet somebody at the bar or at night and it's all good but then in the morning you don't want them around anymore? I'm getting too old to do that shit.

Also don't think that I didn't notice before you said you'd been with other guys aside from me. Are you going to tell me about that, did you get it or what?!

I didn't really plan on coming back for I'm not sure what I'm doing for Christmas yet. I forgot to say before that hell no I don't talk to my dad anymore. Usually only come back once a year so I don't have to see him. Plus my jobs and stuff. Maybe Max'll wanna put me up for a couple days.

Well I guess I could fill three pages after all. Hope you like the pictures. I'll write less next time.

Yours,

Billy

December 10th, 1995

Hey Bill,

All of the photos you sent are really beautiful, did you really take those? I mean the place you were at looks amazing but the shots are great too. Incredible really. You have a really good eye. That's what you say when you really like someone's pictures right? I especially like the shot of the bridge with the pine trees and all the ones of the ocean. You know I've still never been to the ocean or anything. Thank you for sending those to me. I feel kind of bad now because they're so nice, don't you want 'em? You said you don't really use your camera anymore, why not?

And hey like I said you can tell me whatever you want. You keep saying that I say sorry too much so I want you to know you don't have to say sorry either. It's really okay. You know I thought about you so much over the last cou I want to know about your life. When we were together, you always knew how to make me feel okay too. Actually even back when we were 'just friends.' Like when I was getting all worked up over my classes or about how stupid I was or something. You could always make me calm down just by saying two sentences or making fun of me. You made it easy for me to be nice to you. You deserve someone who's nice to you even if it's not me.

Ha ha, well I wouldn't exactly say my mom found out about us, I mean I told her. I remember you were so mad at me when I did that but we'd been going around for a whole year. I knew she would be ok with it though. She liked you a lot. She was really worried about you when you disappeared. It's almost funny, my dad thought I was just bummed out about some girl.

I don't think its funny that you worked at a charity for Thanksgiving, I think its great Bill. I kind of wish that I had ever thought to do something like that. Unsurprisingly I don't think we have many places around here that do kinda stuff, I mean nothing big like that.

And ok ok ok I'll stop talking crap about my job. You're right and I do like it. I think I'm good at it too, well ok at least. It just seems like when you write about your jobs I can tell that you really love em, especially the diner I guess. I definitely don't have any people like

your friend Daria at my work. Sometimes I just feel like I'm not I don't know. I guess that I always thought if I did all these things like I was supposed to – you know like get a good job and get a house and stuff that I would feel really fulfilled or something. I do like my job but I also really do feel fucking boring a lot. I thought there'd be more to it or something. Do you ever feel like that?

I do still go camping and hiking but not as much as I used to. Like not how when we were together or anything. Sometimes I go hiking by myself or with Dustin but you know he starts huffing and puffing after about a mile still. It'd be really cool if I had a dog or something. I dunno if you remember Tim and Alison from my school, you were friends with them too. We went to that lake together once. I'm still pretty cool with them but they moved back out of state so I don't see them too much anymore. We were supposed to go on a big camping trip this last summer, but it's hard for us all to get off work at the same time. Do you go on a lot of trips and stuff?

I really liked the story about how you met your friend Daria. It made me laugh and I can see you doing that. I bet I would have gotten stuck on the gate or something and you'd end up having to turn yourself in to save me. Also her kid sounds great, I bet you've babysat more than five times. She sounds really nice, do you stay at her place a lot? How old is she if she's got a kid that's five already?

There I go with all my questions again. You know you asked me last time if I had trouble reading your letters because of the way that you write, I don't have any trouble. When I read what you write it just feels like it's you here saying it so it's easy. I like readin what you have to say. I wish I could write as much as you do.

I didn't fly first class out to Idaho and the hotel we stayed in wasn't too fancy, sorry to disappoint you. We're still kind of a startup company so we can't really do all that ritsy stuff yet. There was a bar at the hotel so we spent the day after Thanksgiving getting loaded and the two guys I was with just complained about their wives so I felt bored. How come people get married if they aren't really happy? They aren't much older than me. Do you remember when we went out to that Motel 6 and I made fun of you for taking all those towels. I can't really remember why we went out there, was it for that show? This place had the same ugly zigzag carpet.

Well I'm sure you know that we don't actually build anything at my job, we just do all the planning and stuff. What we're doing now at the new site is setting up for this real big shopping mall. They're hoping its gonna boost the population and all that. A couple big stores have already signed on and there's gonna be three elevators. Really exciting stuff. Okay I'm doing the thing again. It actually is exciting if you can believe it.

Well what else. You've asked me a couple times about my friends or I guess my coworkers at my job and I don't have too much to say about them. They're nice enough people. I think actually my closest friend at work is this girl named Carly. She's sorta like my unofficial secretary because she always reads over my stuff so I don't fuck up at a meeting. She's kinda quiet but she's real funny. Like my boss will be going off about something and she'll just look over at me and suddenly we're both trying not to crack up. You know that kinda friend? She never comes out to the bar with us or anything though. I realized writing this that I guess I don't actually even know her too well. Maybe I should try to change that.

I do actually have a house, it feels weird to tell you about. It's not like I've got a family or anything. It is kinda near the art museum, you remember the numbered streets out that way? I got it a little less than three years ago when I was 26 or 27. The market was really low at the time and you know I was dating that girl and it just seemed like something smart and like something I should do so I got it. It's not too big or anything. Two bedrooms and two bathrooms. A creepy basement that Dustin says is haunted but it's just the washing machine. He says that every time he comes over but its always the washing machine. My friends from work or the two people I still talk to from college like to come over on the weekends 'cause there's no landlord. Well aside from me. Sometimes it's kinda lonely really. My mom is always in my business and she thinks I should get a roommate.

Ha, okay well you asked me about what stuff I've done with other guys and honestly I don't really have a big story to tell you. I wasn't I didn't go out with anybody for a long time after you left. Right after I graduated college Dustin dragged me out to this gay bar, he couldn't even drink then, and I found this guy there. I don't even remember

his name really, but it was a long time ago. Jesus that sounds really awful. Something with a M I think. We only hooked up like two or three times. Then I went around with this guy named Taylor for a couple months maybe when I was 23 or so. But I wasn't really It was just casual and he was seeing other people and you know I'm not really into that. I didn't really do too much with either of them. Just 'mouth stuff' as Dust puts which sounds truly horrible when he says it, he needs to never talk about sex. I never really did anything else with other guys aside from you.

I guess I'm sorry it didn't work out with you and your boyfriend. You can tell me about him if you want. Did you guys go out for a long time? So do you have mostly gay friends I guess or what? If you wanna tell me about him I guess I'll tell you about my last girlfriend Melissa. If you want or whatever.

Also, I can't picture somebody coming home to hook up with you and then just falling asleep. But I do know what you mean, what you wrote about finding someone at a bar and then regretting it later. I guess that's why I haven't been with anyone in a while. It all just seems so If it's not going to make you happy than what's the point.

I got a kick out of your three pages of stationary. The flowers on the top are a nice touch, what are those lilies? Does your friend Daria know that you're writing to me? Actually that's dumb, I'm sure she doesn't know who I am. And don't say sorry for writing too much, I don't think you write too much. I wish I had more interesting stories to tell you. You always had this way of talking and stuff. I'm not so good at writing like you are.

Well I guess I'll survive without a picture of you and your new haircut. I figured you didn't talk to your dad anymore. He was always a total piece of shit to you. I dunno how you ever You always just acted like things were okay at home or when you had to go back there for something. You know he and Susan really got into it after you left. She and Max cleaned out that little apartment you had.

Well if you do come home back for Christmas you know I'll be around. Maybe I can buy you a beer or something, it'd be nice to see you.

I hope you have a good week and all. Seems like we've been writing each other about once a week lately.

About to be late for work again,

Steve

December 19th, 1995

Steve,

Well you know we keep telling each other not to say sorry in these letters or not to worry about writin so much but I guess I wanna say sorry again for writin so much. I don't want you to feel put out writing me some big long thing. I like everything you write and I think your stories are just fine.

I bet you're real busy what with the holidays and at your work and all. You probably got about a million presents to buy, I remember you always had something for everyone. Lucky for me I'm still an asshole and I only got about five presents to buy. I'm actually really swamped with work at the shop this week so maybe I'll actually write you less than three pages for once. Sorry if I don't answer everything but I'll send you a big thing later if ya want.

Yeah I remember how pissed off I was when you told your mom about us. I guess I just thought she wouldn't want me around you anymore. I wish Think we fought for like two weeks over that shit. I don't really deserve you bein' nice to me about it now, I know I could be a real prick.

I remember how I always used to say shit about other guys to try and make you jealous and how pissed off you'd get. I don't know why I did stupid shit like that. You know you were the only guy I ever really l wanted. I dunno if it's okay to say that.

Anyway I'm glad you liked the photos I sent ya. Figured you'd like the ones of the beach and shit. You know you can't tell in the pictures but it was cold as shit when I took those. I think I was there in like April or something. Here in Washington it stays about frozen right up

until May, kinda like back in Hawkins. I don't need 'em back or anything, those are for you.

Hell yeah I remember Tim and Ali! It's cool that you still talk to them. They was always cool with us and with me being all up on you all the time. So did they ever hook up or what? I remember he had a huge thing for her. Shit we used to tease him so bad and he'd always turn so red and tell us to fuck off.

I don't really go out too much either, like camping or whatever. It'd be nice to but like you said everybody's always busy. Be cool in a couple of years when Daria's kid is old enough and we can take him. Right now he's still too small and he needs to eat like every two hours. Then again so do I.

You know Daria actually does know I'm writing to you. She doesn't think it's a good idea She's the only person out here that I ever really told about you. Actually she kinda reminds me of you. Not in the obvious way because she's a chick and all. But she's real steady like you and she puts up with a lotta shit from me. Also she's corny as fuck, she's always got somethin stupid to say. She's actually a couple years younger than me, she's about to turn 26. I dunno how she does all the shit she does. She's a manager at the diner and she's gotta be nice to people all fuckin day, I bet you have to too.

Hey man, about what you wrote in your last letter. That thing you said about how you thought if you did all the things you were supposed to do or whatever, that you'd feel some type of way. Well I feel like that all the time. I don't really love my jobs like you said, I like 'em just fine but I don't love 'em. I think if anybody told you honest-to-god they loved their job they'd be lying. Who would wanna work through the superbowl. And my jobs are shit - anybody could do my jobs, it's not like what you do at your work I bet. I'm not designing buildings or revitalizing the whole population of Idaho or nothing. I think that sounds really cool, what you're doing and all.

Part of why I work so much is because I don't have anything better to do I guess. I've got friends and all but I dunno. You know how I used to get. I guess I feel kinda alone a lot. My therapist Ms Daria says I choose to be that way. I think the happiest I ever was was when I was with you so anyway it aint

Oh and to answer your question, I guess I have some straight friends and some gay friends. Mostly from work and stuff and people that Daria knows. I guess I feel like you do, my coworkers are nice enough. I haven't really told anybody at the shop that I'm gay but I don't really try to hide it anymore. I spent too much time doing that shit. After your I moved back out to Cali I told myself I wasn't gonna do that shit anymore.

Okay first of all Steve they want you to take the towels at places like that. Second of all of course I remember that shitty motel we went to. We went to a Motel 6 two times actually. Not the same one. One time was when we took Max and Lucas out to that Van Halen show. And they fought the whole goddamn time, ha ha, the beginning of the end. Sorry Max. And Sinclair got sick off of two beers. Second time we just wanted to hook up I think. I remember you had that lame-ass roommate once you transferred to State and I think all the little shitheads had taken over my apartment for something, Henderson is a piece of work. I remember lots of stuff. I feel real sorry for that maid who walked in on us, Jesus. Like I said they want you to take the towels.

So what's up with your girl Carly at work? Do you have a thing for her or what? You said you ain't been with anyone in a while. But I think it's great that you have a house and all. I wouldn't know how to be responsible like that. You know once I worked for like five weeks straight and I came home and they'd turned out all my lights because I forgot to send out the bill.

Steve I can't believe you went around with a guy named Taylor. I also can't believe somebody would wanna go around with other people when they got you.

I didn't know they had a single gay bar in Indiana. That's a joke, kinda. Seems like its so different now, from when we were kids. We ain't even that old. And yeah I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours. I don't really got too much to say about Paul, that was my last boyfriend. He was a okay nice guy and all. A couple years older, worked in real estate which meant I always made fun of him. He has this real long hair and Daria said it was like I was dating hot Jesus. We went together for about a year and some change, you know writin this I realized that was the longest relationship I ever been in

aside from with you. I've only ever I dunno if you think I go around with a bunch of guys or something. I've dated a couple people but nothing too serious.

You may or may not remember I'm not exactly the easiest person to get along with. I probably made it real difficult for him. I guess the thing was he wanted us to get a place together and I didn't really wanna do that. We got into it over that and then afterwards there wasn't really much point. Now you gotta tell me about your girl. Does she still work with you?

I forgot that Susan would of had to clean out my place. God there's some shit I feel sorry for her findin'. I wasn't exactly thinkin' clearly when I left. You know Max says that the way my dad acted when I took off was a big part of the reason why her mom and my old man split up. Susan was always real decent to me so at least there was that. You know it was bad for her back then too. I just talked to her this week and she was goin' off asking me what I wanted in my Christmas stocking. Real embarrassing shit.

Well you know I'd love to write you some more but I shoulda left for my shift at the diner about ten minutes ago. I talked to my boss about takin some time off for Christmas but I think it's no dice, a couple people already asked for vacation and all. I'll still see what I can do. It would've been nice to see you and see what all the brats are up to. Maybe I can come out in the spring again or something. If you still wanna buy me a beer.

Hope you have a real good Christmas since I prolly won't hear from you til after. Take care.

Yours,

Billy

December 22nd, 1995

Hey man so you probably won't get this til real late but I wanted to tell you that I won't be around for Christmas, but I got off for a

couple days after. Sue wanted me to come out and stay with her but Max is putting me up in her shitty studio apartment in the city. So if you're around at any New Years parties I'll be lookin for ya.

Yours,

Bill

4. Part Four

Part Four

January 4th, 1996

Hey Bill,

Well I guess I owe you a long letter! It was great to get to see you over New Years, really great. I think the only person more surprised to see you than me was your biggest fan Mrs Wheeler. You looked really great, is it okay to say that? God you looked I don't think your ears stick out too much, ha ha.

I do really wish we had gotten to talk for more than about 45 minutes though. What the hell happened to Max? I've never seen anyone projectile vomit like that before. I guess for once it wasn't us who made her puke or gag. You guys missed the New Years Ball dropping! Actually maybe you're lucky. Dustin probably would have tried to kiss you too.

Sorry because I feel like I just said the same things to you about nine times like an idiot. I was really surprised to see you. I just got your letter that day and I wasn't sure if you'd show up at the thing at Mike's place or not. It was kind of funny how the kids kept poking their heads into the kitchen like they were checkin up on us. No privacy just like in the old days. They're not kids anymore but I guess it's always going to feel like that.

I asked Mike if he dressed his kid up like a Christmas tree on purpose, he thought I was being rude. It's cute to do that shit to babies! There's a really terrible picture of me at a year old dressed up like a pumpkin for Halloween. I had stuffing and all. Anyway Hannah is a really cute baby name, it's a palindrome spelled the same way back and forth! I bet you knew that already. Easy for me to remember. Oh or maybe it doesn't count if it's a persons' name. Did you get to hold her? I bet

Eleven was happy to see you.

Well it would've been nice if we could have met up some more but Max told me that you'd only been in town for two days. I saw her shopping with her mom all hungover still yesterday. Maybe we could. She gave me your phone number so I hope that's okay. I know you said that you took a flight in, how was that?

I hope you had a great Christmas, you know we were together at a holiday party and I forgot to ask you how your Christmas was! I guess I was too nerv there was just so many people around. In your last letter you said that you only had to get five presents – I'm guessing it's Max, Susan, Daria and her kid, who was the fifth person?! And ha ha, I only had to get about five presents too. Two of them were for my parents. You have a really generous memory of me. At work we did some big thing this year but it was mostly just greeting cards and gift cards and all that. The girls brought in a lot of food so I was happy. I still need to eat every 2 hours too like you and Gabriel.

A whole page already and it's just dumb stuff. Sorry about that. Well I just read over your last letter so that I can remember to answer everything. My mom really did always like you. You know she actually asked me about you the other day, I guess somebody told her you had been in town, not me! I asked her who she got her gossip from and she looked at me like I was real funny. You're lucky you're five states away from this.

I'm glad that you know what I mean about not feeling like you're doing anything or the right thing or something. I felt like maybe I didn't explain it good well or something. I tried talking to Dustin about it a couple months ago. He said he didn't know what I was talking about and told me to lighten up. You know you and me are still the opposite though. You said you work all the time because you don't have anything better to do and first off I bet that's not true. But I guess the way I feel is what's the point in working all the time if you can't enjoy yourself when you're not there. You know I haven't been able to take a real vacation in like four years. Bougie problems, I can hear your voice Bill.

And hey I don't think that your jobs are shit or that anyone could do

them. I definitely don't think that. Do you remember the time you tried to show me how to change a tire and I got you 'distracted' or that time I told you about when I tried to make dinner for my mom and the fire department got called to the house. You always could do a lot of things that I couldn't or that a lot of people couldn't, you try to sell yourself short too.

Having a house is pretty much the same as having an apartment, you still have to pay on it every month. I remember you did that at your place back on Cedar Street too, I came over once and you were sitting there in the dark! I guess we still don't know how to be adults. But I always thought you were more responsible than me. You had that place when we were 18 or 19. I lived at home til I was 24! You know I'm going to be 30 in a couple weeks. I almost understand how health insurance works.

I figured you'd remember Ali and Tim. No they never actually got together, he was gonna tell her one year but he lost his nerve! Now she lives out in Illinois and he's in Michigan and she's dating some guy named MARVIN. She asked me about you too recently. A couple months ago because I only hear from her maybe four times a year now. She brought you up because she saw a car just like yours.

Actually I remember when I saw you last week you mentioned something about tires for your truck, do you have a truck now? What kind is it? Did you really sell the Camaro? Sorry cause I forgot to ask you on account of your lost love Mrs. Wheeler butting in on me every two seconds. And you said you were going to a concert this week, who are you going to see? Do you go to shows a lot? What kind of music do you listen to now? You always knew way more stuff than me. And you're in grunge central out there I bet. The last two albums that I bought were an Elastica vinyl and a Dave Matthews Band tape so I'm sure you'll have some stuff to say about that.

Okay I guess that's it for my questions this time. You know you never answered my other question about why you don't really take pictures anymore. Thanks again for all the photos Bill. It's so beautiful out there where you are. If I lived out there we could definitely go camping all the time and I'd make you bring your camera.

Well your friend Daria is the same age as Carly at my work then. And

no by the way I do not have a thing for her, nosy. I didn't mean to imply that last time. She's totally cool and everything but she's not my type I guess, whatever that is. Even if I did wanna start something I'm definitely not dating anybody I work with or who works in the same building again. My dad told me after I broke up with Melissa that you shouldn't shit where you eat. As you may remember he's a very romantic person. Thanks but I'm not sure how I feel about what you said about me and Daria being alike. 'Steady' seems like a really suspice nice way to say 'Boring' if you ask me, ha ha. Also I'm not corny so I don't know what you're talking about. Are you trying to say that we both have a great sense of humor?

Jesus Bill well you know I had really forgotten about that maid walking in on us, thanks for bringing back my trauma. Actually I feel a lot worse for her. She had to see my pasty white ass as I was bending you over that dresser. I can't believe that I forgot about Lucas getting sick off of those two Budweisers!! Little dork. Somehow the two trips got smushed into one in my mind. Okay so I guess you do remember a lot, what else do you remember? Do you remember the first time we ever got together? I bet my version is different.

It's funny that you wrote that you and your boyfriend ended up breaking up because you didn't want to get a place together. That's kinda what happened with me and Melissa. Not exactly the same but kinda. And not funny but you know.

Well I wonder what you would think about my girlfriend, you know you always said that I had a type and that I liked 'nice girls' and all that. Her nickname that everyone called her was Missy if that tells you the kinda girl she was. She kinda looks like Shelley Duvall but without the huge teeth. Definitely nice. What do you think it means that I go out with somebody for two years and all I can describe them as is 'nice?'

That's not what I mean to say. I mean she was a good great really. She was an accountant at the company that's in the same building as my firm. We went together for almost two years and I got the house when I was with her and all. She was a really sweet girl. My parents liked her parents, she had a really nice family. Sometimes we'd spend the weekends together playing house and all. The thing was she said something once and it wasn't a big deal but I guess it turned into a

big deal. We were together one night and she said something like when we get married do you think we'll get a bigger house or just keep this one. And I guess I kind of baw barked at that and she could tell.

It wasn't the house thing or about moving in but I guess her wanting to get married kind of freaked me out. We were together for two years and I never even thought about getting her a ring or something. What does that say about me? So I just brushed it off but it upset her and I didn't know what to do about it. It wasn't like I was gonna go and buy her a ring because I felt bad. After that she started making these comments all the time. Then my mom was sick and she said that I used that as an 'excuse.' I guess we kind of started fighting about it a lot, I mean a bunch of stuff. Finally she said that I wasn't serious about her and we should break it off if I didn't know what I wanted. And you know me I just said okay if that's what you want so we broke up.

She definitely does not still work with me, she got a transfer a couple months after we split. Right around this time last year probably. I feel really bad about it actually. I guess that's why I didn't want to write about it before. Because I felt bad for not feeling worse about it. After we broke up I think she kinda thought maybe I'd make some big gesture to try and get her back. But I didn't do that and I could tell it really hurt her feelings.

Well that's my big sob story that isn't much of a sob story. You know Dustin and some of my friends really liked her and they don't really understand why we broke up. That's when I was trying to talk to Dust about feeling like I wasn't satisfied or something and he said I was nuts. Maybe I am, I don't know.

Well I think this is the longest letter I ever sent you. I hope you got through it okay and that I didn't make too many spelling mistakes. I've been writing this at work like a little nerd. My boss thinks I am reading over some very important paperwork (I did it already, it's Friday and I wanna leave). I hope you have a good weekend and a good time at your concert.

You know about what you wrote way earlier, I actually forgot that you used to tease me about liking other guys. It's not I don't think I

got as pissed off as you think. I guess I thought that was like a joke we had. I knew you didn't want somebody else. You know I would have. For what it's worth I guess I thought we were pretty serious.

Leaving work with two paper cuts,

Steve

January 15th, 1996

Hey Steve,

Don't think I didn't see you hinting about your birthday in your last message, I wasn't gonna forget it. I dunno if it's okay to send you a present but I got you a couple records that I thought you might like. I'm assumin you still have a record player. I bet I still know what you like, you big softy.

So how does it feel to be 30? I think it'll just about be your birthday by the time you get this. Did you wake up and feel like a real adult? If you say yes then I guess I'll have that to look forward to too.

I'm sorry that I couldn't see you some more when I was around. I really wanted to. They needed me at the shop though and it was hard as fuck to find a flight in that didn't break my bank. I was only in town for the two nights. I thought it'd be pretty creepy even for me if I just showed up at your new place or somethin.

You know Maxine would pick a holiday party to get totally shitfaced and all maudlin about her ex at. I've never seen puke that color, I guess she had a lot of those Jell-o shots. Ended up takin her back to her place and she cried about boys for twelve hours. I told her she shoulda tried to hook up with Sinclair again and she socked me real bad in my arm.

It was real nice to talk to you on the phone too the other night. Sorry that I was runnin out to work so I could only talk for about a minute. I'm usually home by like eleven but I know that's real late where you are.

You looked really great too, last week. I coulda looked at you all night. You know with your baby face you almost look about twenty-one by now. It's okay that you only said nine things because I'm sure I said about fifty thousand, on the phone too. I guess you still make me kinda nervous.

Well it's a Friday night here and I stayed home from the bar like a little nerd to write ya back. That's most of the reason why but also my stupid dog's been real sick lately, so I don't really wanna leave him alone. He hasn't really been eatin and he keeps throwin up even though he ain't been eating. Prolly have to take him to the vet if he don't get better this weekend.

Also I'm in the doghouse with Daria right now (ha ha) on account of I took her kid Gabriel with me to see Happy Gilmore earlier this week. It was barely even a R rated movie anyway, you know the kid ain't gonna remember it. She said I shoulda taken him to see a Disney film but I ain't about that. It's been two years and the fuckin Lion King's still got me messed up. Did you ever see that shit?

Steve you make me smile a lot with some of the crap you write. Like your stupid pumpkin costume with stuffing and all. Ali and her new boyfriend Marvin the Martian, poor Tim. Jesus. And you know what Mr. Smart Guy I think you're right, it's still a palindrome even if it's somebody's name. Can't believe Wheeler let me but I did get to hold the baby! Right before Max puked her guts everywhere. I barely got to talk to you and I think I saw El for about all of 11 seconds (ha, ha). Guess I have to come back next year.

Thank you for sayin what you said about my jobs not being shit. But you know you could learn all that stuff about cars too if you wanted to. The cooking thing, okay I'm not sure. I don't actually remember the story about the fire department coming to your house but I do remember that one time you tried to make a pizza at my apartment. Well I never thought I was gonna be getting my security deposit back anyway. What do you do now when you need to eat?

Oh and you know what, no I didn't mean you were fucking boring. I knew you were going to write that shit. By steady I meant that you are actually a really dependable and responsible person. It means you're good people, you dingdong.

Let me try and answer your questions and get this letter in order. My flight was okay, and my fifth present was for my landlady since she lets me get away with a lot of shit. Yeah I did get a truck, I got a '89 Chevy CK for real cheap because my Camaro was always breakin down. You know me and Chevys. I didn't actually sell the Camaro but I was thinking about it, couldn't bear to do it in the end. Right now it's like halfway to runnin again. So I got two cars when I don't even really need one. I heard you don't got your Beemer anymore, what do you drive now?

What you wrote about it bein grunge central out here made me laugh because everyone in this state acts like they fuckin' discovered Nirvana all by themselves. Just realized that was a pun, do ya like it? Real shame about the singer the other year. Prolly the only blonde I was ever into. The first time I heard that Come As You Are song I felt like I got kicked in the fuckin face, it was that good.

I guess I do kinda go to shows a lot. It's not like out in Indiana where you get like one big band a year comin through. Mostly I get dragged to whatever punky girl band Daria's into that month or I got this one other friend Ryan (a girl named Ryan) who's into the kinda shit that I am. You and me always teased each other about the music we liked so I hope you like the records I picked out for you or that you don't have em already. Somethin about those bands makes me think about you so I just hope you like em. Anyway we went to see Stone Temple Pilots and they put on a real good show. They're about my favorite band aside from Alice in Chains I guess. I been out to see them both like three or four times.

You know what I can't even say nothing bad about Elastica because I kinda dig them too. Dave Matthews Band I also ain't saying shit about either but for a different reason. I'm not gonna start somethin with you in a letter. Why you wanna hurt me and tell me about that for. I bet you listen to fuckin Blues Traveler too Steve. Now you're gonna say I'm being mean.

I got a really strong-worded postcard from Henderson in the mail the other day, did he tell you bout writin me? I guess he wants to know about my intentions towards you. He's kinda funny.

Okay well I really did forget to answer this last time but you asked

why I don't really take pictures no more. I don't really know why. First off I'm not that good at it. I'm no Jonathan Byers as you might say. By the way I heard he went back to NYU for like the 3rd time. If you ask my therapist Ms Daria I stopped taking pictures when I was with that guy Paul but that ain't really true. She's all I just haven't had time for it I guess. Like you said how you haven't really taken a vacation in four years, I haven't really been out too much either. What am I gonna do, take pictures of the shop or people eatin at the diner. I still use the Polaroid sometimes. I guess I lost my passion working all the time. Is that bein an adult? Ha ha.

Steve I don't think you got bougie problems. I never thought that about you. You always worked real hard back when we were in classes together so I bet you work real hard now too. You always took things like that real serious and I think it's great that you've got a life for yourself and all. I always knew you would do something special.

I know that you really like your job and all but do you ever think maybe you work too much? I might be influenced by Henderson's strongly-worded letter and all he had to say about you. You know if you ever wanted to take a vacation or something you could come out here for a few days. I mean you wouldn't have to stay with me or nothin because my place is kinda shitty. But if you ever wanted to I could take you around. I could take you out to the mountains and you could see the ocean and shit. We could see how it goes. If you wanted.

First of all your ass is not pasty, it's fantastic. Phenomenal really. I would Second of all, you're funny, of course I remember the first time we got together and I bet you do too. I guess you want me to tell you a story. Well I only took those classes out at the junior college because my old man was hounding me to do something with my life. It was pure luck for me that you and me got stuck in College Comp 101 together back in the day.

You know I always had a big thing for you. I always liked the way you talked and the way you looked. You got some beautiful fucking eyes man. I still don't even know why you started givin me the time of day. When we had that class together I'd be thinkin all day about some dumb shit to say to you, guess it worked.

I remember we always used to watch movies at my place when my old man wasn't around, back before I got my apartment. I remember it was winter break but I don't remember what movie we were watchin. Bet it was some stupid John Candy flick that you were in love with. I wouldn't know because when we watched movies together I was never exactly paying attention to the TV. Anyway some dumb thing happened on the screen and you were laughing at it and you were just so fucking adorable so I leaned over and kissed you. I dunno if it was exactly a good kiss. I remember your eyes got so big and you fell right off the couch, you looked just like fuckin Bambi or something. There I go with the Disney stuff again. You asked why I did that and I said Cause I like you. You said What about four times like I was tellin a joke and I said I really like you. And you got all freaked out and said something about how you just wanted us to be friends. You booked it for home real quick sayin sorry like you always did.

Well I thought that was that and I cried my fucking eyes out over you for about two hours in my room. You know I never I know I told you later that I'd kissed one other guy back in California but we never really fooled around or anything. I didn't know what I was doin. I thought I really fucked it up with you. Then after I snotted into my pillow for about a decade you came back knocking at my window. And you said Uhhh well I was thinking about it and I changed my mind so I pulled you right through the window. Then we made out for two hours and copped off on my bed. And after you said some corny shit like 'Well do I gotta take you to the movies now.' So we did that too. Anyway that's how I remember it, best night of my life.

It definitely doesn't surprise me that your old man said some real romantic shit like that about your break up. He was always a real piece of shit about you. I always hated the way he talked about you.

Well I'm real sorry to hear that it didn't work out between you and your girl. I guess that's what you're supposed to say right. Prolly I'm not the best person to tell it to on account of the way that I used to feel about you.

All the stuff you wrote sounds like it could be about me. Well if it was about me and a real nice guy instead of a real nice girl. Notice how I haven't said nothing about the name Missy either, I'm being so

good. Anyway I always liked Shelley Duvall a whole bunch. You know when I ended it with my guy Paul I felt real bad about hurtin him, but I guess not bad enough to try and move in with him or anything. Then it took like four months of back and forth getting all our records back from each other and all. I didn't even stop goin to the bar we always went to, he had to stop going. It was really shitty. I was really shitty. If you're worried about bein shitty then don't because I got that covered.

I guess this is a real nice note to end this on. Wish I had somethin else funny to say but it's getting pretty late and all. But I do wanna say that yeah Steve, for what it's worth, I thought we were pretty serious too.

I hope somebody good takes you out for your birthday. I hope you have a real good week, let me know what ya did. Hope I hear from ya soon.

Yours,

Billy

January 22nd, 1996

Hey Bill,

Thanks a lot for the records you sent me! I really liked all three of them. I never heard of Collective Soul but I think I like that one the best. I'm listening to it now actually (yes I do still have a record player). I really wasn't hinting about my birthday though, you didn't have to get me anything. Yours is coming up in a month or so I guess I should start thinkin of a present too.

I've heard of Alice in Chains but I think they're a little too hard for me. And S-T-P, I know them too, they sing that Creep song that's not by Radiohead right? I like that one music video they have with the big dogs in it and I like that song they got about leaving on the train too. I knew you'd be into Nirvana. And you made me laugh because I do like Blues Traveler. I think, have always thought, a good

harmonica really makes a song. I'm restraining myself a lot a lot and I'm not even gonna quote the song. I bet you know what line I wanna write too.

Well as you know my birthday was on Friday and no I didn't wake up magically feeling like an adult or like I knew everything. In fact I spilled coffee all over myself at my job right before we had a meeting with a big company for another new building. But I just made a joke out of it so I think it went okay.

It was nice to talk to you on the phone, thanks for calling me back so fast. I know that you work a lot and all. I think I missed your call on Friday because a couple guys from work took me out to the bar. Then I met up with Dustin and he took me out to another bar. I don't think I've been that drunk since I was 25 so it's probably a good thing I missed your call. It's Sunday now and I'm almost recovered.

Bill you would take a four year old to see an Adam Sandler movie, that made me laugh a lot too. You're right though and he probably won't remember it. It's not like you took him to see a horror movie or something. I have not seen the Lion King but you know I heard about it because Darth Vader does the main voice. If you have a lot of your big feelings about The Lion King I sure would be interested in hearing them. And I'm sorry that your dog's not feeling good and I hope he gets better. I know you said before that he likes to eat socks all the time, maybe that's catching up with him?

Hey I'm kind of surprised that you know I don't have the BMW anymore. I got a '91 Lexus when I turned 24, I guess it was kind of a present from my dad for finally moving out. It was nice of him I guess. I don't need something that fancy. You know I'm surprised that you mentioned him – you only met him once or twice I think. He was never as bad as your old man. I don't want to complain about my dad or anything. He's not really so hard on me anymore. And I'm glad that you still have the Camaro.

God Billy I'm really sorry about Dustin, I didn't know that he sent you somethin. That's so embarrassing. I told him we were talking again before. He was snooping around in my desk a couple weeks ago which is not unusual because he is always snooping around in my desk. I don't think he read anything that we wrote but you know he's

got that eidentic or somethin memory so he must of got your address. Sorry and I definitely did not want him to do that.

Thank you so much for reminding me about that time I tried to make dinner for you at your apartment. I think bringing something like that up after so long is considered overkill. And I bought you that really nice rug to cover up the scorch marks on the kitchen floor! I want you to know I can cook about seven things now. That's six more then when we were together. Bet you feel silly.

Well thank you for saying that my ass is fantastic. I don't know if it is so great anymore, mostly it just sits in a chair nowadays. And I guess I did want you to tell me a story. You know I must of have a thing for you too. I let you hang around me because I thought you were funny, Bill. I remember the first time Max dragged you out to a movie with us all and I thought you were gonna be a real douchebag but I ended up wanting to be friends with you instead.

I remember it as pretty much the same except we weren't watching a comedy, I'm pretty sure we were watching one of those horror movies you liked so much. You were all excited because you found a VHS copy of this really, really terrible movie about some girl who was possessed by a demon. The girl in the movie was named Susan like your stepmom so we kept laughing about it. I was laughing at some dumb thing you said and not the movie when you kissed me. And I wouldn't say exactly that I fell off the couch, I would say that you knocked me over really. You know I decided that I changed my mind in about five minutes and then it took me the other two hours to get up the nerve to go back there to your place. And oh my god, I don't believe for a single second that you cried in your bed, you're too funny. Did you really do that?

Billy I don't really You know I've got some more things I want to write but I'm not sure if I should be writing them. I'm sorry because I really liked your last letter but I think it's got me feeling kind of confused. And I just read over everything I wrote back and maybe I shouldn't be saying some of these things. I feel like we've kind of been dancing around all this stuff but we're not really saying what we mean.

I guess I'm kind of an asshole but I should tell you that I really hated

hearing about your boyfriends and all. I hated hearing about other people you've been with. I was glad when you wrote me a couple months ago sayin you hadn't been out on a date in a year. Maybe that's not fair because it's been years and I've been with other people too. I didn't even let myself think about you for so long so maybe it's crappy for me to not want you to of moved on.

Anyway I don't even know what I'm trying to say. I don't know how serious you were about it but I don't think we should I don't think it's a good idea for me to come out there and see you. It's just that I'm really busy with work lately and we've got that new project we're starting on soon and I just don't think it's a good idea.

We've been writing to each other for about six months now. I really look forward to your letters and I'm glad we're talking again and I'm glad I saw you again. I just don't know what we're You said in your last letter that you aren't the best person to hear about my girl problems because of the way you feel about me. I guess I don't really know what that means Billy. I guess I just don't know what you think feel like maybe we shouldn't get too involved like that again.

I don't know. I hope this makes sense. I thought for a long time trying to figure out how to write this. You know Bill I really love like hearing from you and I want you in my life but I don't know if I can really do all this stuff again. I think we should just talk like normal. I hope that's okay. I hope I hear from you soon.

Steve

January 31st, 1996

Steve,

Hey I'm sorry if I made you feel confused or upset or somethin. I don't mean to be doing that. When I started writin to you I just wanted to say sorry and I wanted to see how you were because I missed you.

I don't know if you really believe that. That's all I wanted to do. But I

just let myself get real crazy about you again and I guess I took it too far saying all that stuff and hittin on you again. I can't help myself. I was too excited to be talkin to you again.

I didn't mean anything by sayin you should come out here. I'm sorry if I made you feel put on the spot. I can understand why you wouldn't wanna do that. I didn't mean to make some big thing out of it. I just meant like maybe if you wanted to take a break or something. I didn't mean it like we had to get involved again.

You know I only came back to town last month to see you. I didn't care about the holiday or seein the kids or even seeing El's real cute baby. I'm sorry cause I guess I thought maybe you were feelin the same way about me that I felt about you. That's ok if you weren't. I'm sorry for writing all that stuff before too if it makes you feel weird.

So I just I've been real busy at work and I haven't been feeling too it seems like I don't got too much time this week. I promise I'll send you a big thing later if you want. I'm glad you had a good birthday. I just want to know that you're happy.

Billy

5. Part Five

February 12th, 1996

Hey Bill,

I ran into Max last weekend at the store with her mom again and she asked me if I'd gotten any calls or anything from you. She told me that your dog died and I didn't know about that. I'm really sorry to of heard about Buster. I hope you're doing okay. I could tell how much you cared about the dog because of the way you wrote about him. That's made me feel really terrible. Write me back soon and let me know you're okay. I'm about to get on a plane to Illinois but I'll be back next week and I wanna hear if you're doing all right. Just know I'm thinking about you.

Steve

February 23rd, 1996

Bill,

Well I haven't heard from you in a couple weeks. The last I got was a pretty short message from you so I'm gathering that maybe I ticked you off or something in my last letter. I didn't Maybe that's arrogant or selfish of me because I know you have other things going on too. But I thought I would of heard back from you. You know, I was just going to let it go if you wanted to let it go but I don't think that I can really do that anymore. I don't want you to be ticked off at me but I also don't think it's fair of you to just drop me again. I just don't really know what you want from me.

None of this is really fair Bill. I mean this whole situation with you and me. Maybe it's my fault because I'm still pretty stupid. I've always been so stupid for you. I didn't hear from you for eight whole years and then when I got your note back in September the first thing I did

was practically break my frickin neck running out so I could get some papers to write you back. That probably sounds really stupid to you but it's true. I've always been totally nuts for you. And I've been feeling pretty shitty the last couple weeks thinking that I might have hurt your feelings somehow and that's not fair.

I'm sorry if maybe you're busy or something but you know we've been writing a lot this last year and it means I can't I don't even know what I want to say. I missed you so goddamn much this whole time and I meant it when I said I wanted us to be friends but I don't know if that was a good idea. I don't know if I can really do that. If I can just be friends with you like nothing happened. I thought it might not be a good idea to do this to myself again but I didnt care. And I know I wrote you a million times that it was okay and that we didn't need to talk about it but I guess I wanna talk about it.

I was I've been trying so hard to let it go and not be fucking stupid over you like I used to be. But I can't help being an idiot over you. You know my whole stupid week revolves around getting a stupid fucking letter from you in the mail? If I'm so stupid over getting a single goddamn letter from you then I really don't think I should go out there and see you.

I guess I hurt your feelings when I said it wasn't a good idea if I came out there. I don't know why you would think it was a good idea or why you would wanna do this to me again. I guess I don't really know what you want from me. I don't know what you're doing.

You left me, Billy. I was in love with you and I thought you loved me too. We were together for over a YEAR, for almost two years. We fucked for almost two years. We did everything together and then you just left me. All I've got left from you is a stupid box of your crap that you left behind. You know I still have your mom's necklace that you gave me when I turned 21. I don't know if you want that back because I haven't asked you. I kept it all this time. I got your stupid VHS copy of The Karate Kid. I've got those stupid sexy Polaroids that you took of me and of me and you, I guess you didn't want those when you left either. I never did anything like that with anybody else. You told me I was You made me feel really special. You're the only person who ever told me I was beautiful.

You know all the shit we did and you KNOW I don't care about being gay or you being gay but I wouldn't do the things we did with just anybody. I fucking loved you Billy. I was in love with you. You were all I ever thought about, it wasn't just sex. You know you say in these letters that you remember everything but I remember a lot of stuff too. And I guess I've been having too much fun writing you and getting stupid over you again but I guess I don't think we should do this again.

You know I remember I stayed over at your place one night, it was the last night we were together. In the morning you kissed me and you said I love you, you told me you loved me and you said you'd call me after you went to class and got done work because we were supposed to go out. And then you never called me and you fucking left.

I thought you were dead, Billy. We all thought you were dead. Me and Max and Dustin and Lucas and your stepmom we all thought you were dead. You know I was a fucking mess for about a month, well I was a mess for a lot longer than that. I sat around at your old house with Max and Lucas and Susan and we all thought you were fucking dead. Your stepmom called all the hospitals in the area looking for you. She called the fucking morgues Billy. We had the police out looking for your car, we thought you fucking reeked it somewhere. I don't know what we thought.

I couldn't eat or sleep or work and I almost failed all my fucking classes because I thought you were dead. I cried to my mom about you for months. If your stepmom didn't know about you and me before that she definitely knew with the way I was carrying on about you. I was so worried about you and I couldn't think about anything but you and then you know one day Max called me up and she told me you weren't dead, you just went back to California.

You left the fucking state and you didn't tell me why and you've never told me why. You keep saying all this cryptic secretive shit about why you left and how it wasn't me but I can't see how it wasn't me. And I don't understand. Did I do something to you? You said you didn't meet someone else but I can't see how you didn't meet somebody else. Because you told me one day you loved me and then you fucking left me.

You know I would have done anything for you. You know I still fucking would. I don't care if that's pathetic or what but we can't keep writing to each other and playing this game and fucking I don't know fucking flirting with each other and acting like you didn't fucking leave me like it was nothing.

I know I'm not good at writing like you are but I guess I need you to know how bad you hurt me. This whole time I've been trying to act like you didnt hurt me so bad. I don't know if you meant to or not but you ruined my fucking life when you left me. It doesn't matter if I'm not mad anymore and I swear I'm not but it still fucking hurts Bill. I fucking loved you.

So I guess I wanna know, I need to know did I do something to you? Or if you wanted to break it off with me so bad you didn't need to leave the fucking state. You wrote me before that you needed to get out of Hawkins and that doesnt make any sense to me. Because we talked about that shit so much and I said a bunch of times I would have gone anywhere you wanted, done whatever you wanted. So obviously you didnt want me to go with you. That's fine and all but I don't understand why you're writing me now all these years later acting like you made some big mistake. That's not fair Billy.

And you know what else, when you left I didn't just lose you. I lost Max too. She was always hangin around Dustin and Mike and all them, and then after you and I got together she was always hangin around with us too. We all went everywhere together, you know I always wanted a brother or a sister and she was like a kid sister to me too. She was my friend too Bill. And then one day she calls up and tells me you're not dead, you're just fine and you're in California. And she got all weird about it and she wouldn't tell me why you left or if you said anything about me and she started avoiding me all the time like I did something wrong to you. What did I do to you? I need to know what I did because it's been killing me for eight fucking years.

I'm sorry if this isn't the kinda letter you want to be getting from me. I'm sorry I don't have any fun stories to tell you or more shitty memories of us together to write to you about. You know you broke my heart and I've been trying all this time to act like you didnt do that or that it was okay. I just really want to know what I did to you.

Can you please just tell me what I did to you so I can let it go. You don't have to talk to me anymore after that if you don't want but I just really need you to tell me what I did. If you just tell me what I did then I'll be okay.

March 5th, 1996

It's been another two weeks and I still haven't heard from you. You know I'm starting to feel really stupid. I called your place last night too and it said the number got disconnected so I guess maybe you moved again or something. Your birthday's in a couple days and I got you somethin before, but I don't know if I should send it in case you don't get it or you don't want it. I guess I'm worried about you. My last letter didn't get returned to me so maybe you still got it. I really just can't Please don't do this to me again Billy.

Steve

March 16th, 1996

Steve I'm really sorry. I don't know if you still want to hear from me but I wasn't ignoring your letters. I'm really sorry. I dunno if you heard about that big tropical storm we had last month but it hit us out here really bad and my apartment building got fucking wrecked. That's why my phone wasn't working. I've been staying at Daria's apartment til I find a new place. I guess all the mail got fucked up because I left her building number as my forwarding address but I didn't get all your letters til just the other day. I wasn't ignoring you. I'm really sorry.

I'm writing you this back right away but maybe I shouldn't. Maybe you don't want to hear from me anymore. But it's killing me to sit here reading about how you thought I left because you did something wrong or that you did something to me. I can't stand it. I can't fucking stand it Steve.

You know maybe after you read this you'll think I'm a fucking coward and you won't wanna talk to me anymore. That's ok. I always told myself I'd never tell you why I left and I thought that'd be better for you and for me. But I can't stand it you thinkin you did something to me or that you weren't good enough.

I'll tell you what happened and I'll send this out and then maybe I won't hear from you no more. I always figured you'd be real mad at me if you knew the real reason. I remember that day too. I remember we were supposed to go to the movies that night. You said you wanted to take me out on some fancy date, you know you always made me feel real special too. It's been a long time but I remember that day too. So I'll just tell you.

What happened was your dad came to see me at my work. You remember I worked at that little supermarket out past Henderson's house. Well I was stocking shelves in aisle twelve and I seen your old man walk in, think it was about two o'clock. He walked right up to the counter and talked to my boss Mr McConnell and I heard him say Yeah he's in today and he pointed me out to your dad. And your dad walked right up to me and he put his hand on my shoulder and he said You and me have to have a talk. He led me right to the back room and shut the door behind him. I guess a big hotshot like your dad can kinda do whatever he wants.

I'm sorry because I guess I kinda blocked a lot of this shit out but what happened was that your dad had found out about you and me and he was real mad. I always thought your mom ended up tellin him about us but the way you talk maybe she didn't. Either way he found out somehow and he was really angry. He wanted me to leave you alone and he went on talking that he didn't need some faggot ruining his son's life. And I think I said some corny bullshit like Too bad I love your son, I know I said some corny bullshit like that cause he cracked me right in the face. You know nobody hits me but my old man and the only reason I didn't pop him back was because he was your dad and I knew you wouldn't want me to do that. He about knocked me off my fuckin feet.

So you know he said a lot of shit to me, he was real calm about it. He said he could ruin me in this town and I laughed at him because I didn't care about that shit. And he said he could ruin my old man and

he could ruin Susan in this town and well maybe I cared about that. And he told me I had to leave you alone, I had to break it off with you or he said maybe I could run off with you but that would be it. You know he said that you were a little slow and that made me real mad. He said you never made smart choices in your life and that I was takin' advantage of you. That if I really wanted I could have you but if I did that I'd be ruining you. He said that if I didn't break it off with you he'd pull you out of college and he'd kick you out and cut you off or whatever. He'd stop paying for your school and all that and take away your car and kick you out. And he asked me if I really wanted to do that to you and that you'd hate me for it.

Well he told me to think real hard about what he said and then he patted me on the shoulder like we'd had a real good talk. He told me I had til the end of the week to end it with you and that if I didn't do it by then he'd hear about it. He said he was gonna have a big talk with you, then you could come with your suitcase to my rathole apartment. You know he knew my address and everything. Then he left and I was just standing there in the stock room with my lip bleeding.

Well I didn't know what to do Steve and I'm sorry. You know it was more than eight years ago now but I still remember the way I felt so panicked like I could barely see or nothing. I felt like a crazy person. It was like back when my friend died I decided to leave San Francisco and I didn't have nowhere to go again.

I'm sorry Steve I didn't know what to do. Maybe that sounds like an excuse or something. You know how stupid I was back then. I didn't know what to do, I was twenty fucking years old. Back then I was so scared about being queer and I couldnt even say it to you that I was queer and I was so scared about anybody findin out about us, findin out about me. I guess that Susan and I were cool and all after I moved out when I graduated but she ain't my real mom and it's not like I could've asked my fuckin dad for advice. And you know we talked about it before that your old man wouldn't understand about me and you so I thought maybe you really would hate me for lettin him find out.

I remembered what you had said before bout how he treated his employees and how you wanted to finish college and get your degree

so you'd never end up working for him. I remembered how one time he went off on you when we was in the garage and he didn't know I was there, he really tore into you. That was just some stupid shit too like over him finding some of our beer cans or somethin so I just couldn't even I didn't know what he'd do or say to you if you two sat down to have a big discussion about you fuckin me.

And I knew how hard you worked at school and all that shit. You were finally doin real good at university and I couldnt let him pull you out of school. And you know what I guess maybe I'd always thought we wouldn't last anyway or that it would end like this because one day you'd wise up and you'd see that it'd be so much easier without me. I was just so scared man. I thought you were gonna hate me. So I walked right out of work in my fucking apron and I went to my rathole apartment and I cried my fucking eyes out trying to think about what to do. Maybe I should have just talked to you but I was real scared. I just packed up some of my shit and started driving. I think maybe I meant to come back but I just started driving.

I went and stayed with my mom's uncle for a while and then I stayed in these shitty motels until I ran out of money. Finally I got a job and I thought to call Max. I thought about calling you every night but I couldn't make myself do it. I thought maybe if I called you I'd end up coming back. It sounds so fucking stupid now.

And I'm real sorry about Max and I'm sorry if she cut you off or whatever. You know I finally told her about what your dad said to me and she was real upset. But I made her spit swear on the phone not to say anything to you and that it'd be better for you. I don't know why I did that, I was fuckin screamin at her on the phone. Well she was screaming at me back and she was real mad because it'd been about a month and she and you and her moms had been so worried. She said I was being a fucking idiot but I made her swear. I guess she felt real guilty about not telling you what happened. You were her friend too. She always liked you way more than she liked me.

You know I always wanted to come back. I wanted to write you something or call you but I was scared about your dad finding out. I was scared maybe he would still have done all that shit he talked

about anyway and that you'd be angry at me. For like a year I thought about calling you or writing you. For years really. I always wanted to come back.

But then I started talkin to Max more and more and she told me you were graduatin' and she said you were doing okay and all that. And then later she told me about that new car your parents had bought you and how you'd moved out and got a place so I thought maybe you were really all right. I just tried really hard not to think about you but I always thought about you. You know I had my own life and I know you had yours too. But I was always thinkin about you. I swear to god after Max told me about you movin out I laid up in my bed every night for like a month like a freak thinkin how maybe I could go back to you now. Except I knew I couldn't really do that because I knew I hurt you.

Baby I loved you, Steve. I loved you so much. I know it's been a really long time and maybe it doesn't make any sense anymore but I guess I still love you. You were the first guy I ever really wanted and I could never believe you wanted me too. I loved you. I loved you so fucking much and I'm sorry I fucked it up. I guess I'm just a coward but I know I fucked it up. I always wanted to come back. I'm glad you kept my mom's necklace because I wanted you to have it. That was the only good thing I had and you were the best thing I had.

You know when I saw you this past summer it felt like my heart stopped or some shit. And then you smiled and walked over and it felt like fate or something, seein you again. And it was selfish but I couldn't stop thinkin about you, I never stopped thinkin about you. So I decided to write you a letter. Like what you said about being stupid over me and how you practically broke your neck running out to write me back, well I did that too and I sat around for like a week like a little idiot with my letter trying to decide what to say and if I was even gonna send it out.

But I knew I was gonna send it out. Maybe it wasn't fair of me to do that when I was supposed to let you go. You know Daria was real mad at me when I told her I started writin you because she knew all about you. She said it was wrong and I wasn't bein fair to you. She said I should tell you right away why I left but I didn't do that because I was still scared. She was right and it wasn't fair. But I didn't

care because I just wanted to hear from you so bad.

You don't have to write me back anymore if you don't want. I know I haven't been fair to you and it wasn't fair of me to ask you to come out here. I guess I just never really got over you. It's not right of me to be wishin you felt the same way. I didn't write this before in my last letter but I wanted to. I remember back when it was ending with Paul we got into some big fight about us not moving in together, you know he was going on about how he never even got to stay at my place or nothin. And he was being all dramatic and he said some shit like Do you even love me Billy. And I just fucking stared at him like an idiot. You know I realized you were the only person I'd ever said it to like that. I hadn't seen you for about seven years and he was staring at me and I was still just thinkin about you. So after that it was pretty obvious that I had to break it off with him. Everybody I've ever been with I've compared to you and it never evens out.

I'm sorry it took me so long to get back to you. I really didn't know you'd been writing me. I'm sorry. I'm really fucking sorry. Just know that you didn't do nothing wrong and that I loved you Steve. I wanted to come back and I'm sorry. If I don't hear from you again know that it's okay.

Yours,

Bill

6. Part Six

Part Six

To: Billy Hargrove
2034 Pioneer Hwy
Stanwood WA 98292
March 21st, 1996

Bill,

I just got your letter the other day, about two days ago really. I'm writing you back as soon as I can. I've been trying to figure out how to write back to you and say the things I want to say to you in the right way.

You know I wish I could call you or something. I even tried to get your friend Daria's number out there in Washington so that I could call you but I realized pretty quickly that I don't even know her full name or anything. So that didn't get too far.

I did hear about that big storm a couple weeks ago but somehow it didn't really register with me that it hit where you are. I feel really stupid now and I'm worried about you. Are you ok? Were you at your place during it? Did you get hurt? Please say you're ok and all. I'm sor

Billy I swear I didn't I've started writing this two other times and I just can't I don't even know what I want to say. It just keeps turning into a big mess so I'm sorry. This is probably gonna be totally screwed up by the time I'm done. I really hope that you get this soon and that you'll read what I have to say and that I'll hear back from you. I really need to hear back from you okay?

Well I got your letter on Tuesday night once I got home from work and I was not exactly I was really upset after I read it. I stayed up all

night thinking about the stuff you wrote and reading what you wrote over and over. It was not really a good night for me.

Yesterday I called off work and I went to see my mom. I guess she could tell that I was pretty upset about something right away. She made me sit down at the table with her. I asked her if she remembered about you and me and she said of course she did.

I asked her if she ever told my dad about us and she said of course not. And I said that was kind of funny to hear that. I told her what you wrote me and that you said that my dad was the reason why you left. That he threatened you and stuff. I asked her if she knew about that or if he had ever said something to her about making you leave then could she please tell me now.

And my mom got really quiet which is what happens when she gets angry. She just sat there getting really angry. At first I didn't know if she was angry at me and I felt like I was ten years old or something. She said that she never knew my dad had talked to you. She said that he never even mentioned you being my friend or anything. She said that she didn't know anything about it and that maybe I should go and talk to my dad. She was really upset.

Well I did go and talk to my dad. He was in his fancy office in Bridesburg on one of his four hour lunch breaks and he was real surprised and happy to see me. Well he got a lot less happy pretty quick.

I asked him if he remembered the name Billy Hargrove and he said what is that one of your friends from school. And I said no that was the guy I was sleeping with for two years back when I was 21 and he stared at me. And I said do you remember his name now and he stared at me some more. So I asked him what he did and if he really ran you out of town and he kind of laughed about it.

You know I'm sorry Billy but when I first read your letter I almost didn't believe you. But when I went to see my dad and I saw his face and I saw him laugh about you I knew it was the truth. He laughed about it and he said 'did you take off of work for this' like it was a big joke to him. He said that all that was a really long time ago and he said something like 'what happened did he finally come crawling

back to you' and well I got really mad I don't and he said

I guess I don't really want to go into it in this letter but I said a lot of things and then my dad said a lot of things too. He was a real prick like he usually is. Then I yelled kind of a lot and we got into this big thing. And it was pretty bad. I guess you could say we aren't exactly on speaking terms right now. That's ok because I only saw him about three times a year lately anyway.

So then when I got home Dustin called me up and he took me out to the bar and I spilled everything to him. As usual he was really helpful and he said 'You know what we should get more drinks.' Then I don't remember because I got pretty drunk and then I came back home. I went to work today all hungover and now I've been sitting here trying to think about what I should write to you. And I still don't know what to say to you I don't know what to say to make it better

Billy I swear I didn't know any of it. I didn't know that my dad found out about us and I didn't know that he talked to you or anything and I didn't know that he hit you. I'm so sorry that he did that. I didn't know I never knew. I've just been thinking about everything that's happened over the last couple years and I just never knew. You know my dad has always been an asshole to me and to my mom. I knew he was a piece of shit but I never knew he would do something like that. I swear to god I didn't know.

And I don't really know what to say to you now. I don't really remember everything that I wrote to you in my last couple of letters but I'm pretty sure I was a huge asshole to you. I'm sorry. I guess I was still pretty mad at you even if I said I wasn't mad. And I'm really sorry because I didn't know. I'm not mad at you anymore.

God I wish I could talk to you but I wouldn't even know what to say. I feel really screwed up right now about everything.

Bill I just always thought you didn't want me anymore. And I felt like such a stupid prick because I wanted you back so bad. I can't even You know every time I started going out with somebody new I felt like I could finally get over you and I felt like I was saying Fuck You to you. And every time I slept with somebody else I felt like I was saying Fuck You to you. I felt so stupid too because I knew you

weren't thinking about me. But now I know everything and I feel even more screwed up and I'm so sorry.

I understand why you were scared and I'm not mad at you. I wish you would of came to me and told me about what my dad said to you. I understand why you didn't but I wish you had told me. I don't really well I don't blame you for getting scared and leaving town. I don't know what I would've done either. But we could have figured something out.

I wish you would have told me. I wouldn't have let you leave like that, I never would have let you leave. I know how you are and I know how you think but all that stuff my dad said to you didn't matter. You know it's not like he could have pulled me out of college like it was the 1800s Billy. I could have taken out loans like a normal person, if he wanted to kick me out he could have kicked me out. I don't care about that. I could have gotten a place or something. I never needed his money or a fancy car. I would have always wanted to be with you more. We could have figured something out Bill.

Anyway I don't know if any of this makes any sense or if I'm really saying what I want to say. I just needed to write to you as soon as I could.

I feel pretty terrible because I don't think I was exactly nice to you in my last couple letters. I just got myself all worked up again like I always do. I guess I thought I'm really sorry and I hope you're ok. I keep on reading what you wrote me and I feel all crazy or broken up I guess thinking about you being all alone in some motel or something. I just hate it. I can't stand it either Billy I'm sorry. I hate thinking of you crying over me or thinking I would hate you. I hate thinking of you being alone somewhere.

I wish I could have been there with you. You know I just always wanted to make things good for you and I guess I ended up not doing that. I'm so sorry Bill.

Please call me if you can or write me soon and tell me you're ok and all. You can write me whatever you want I just wanna hear from you again. Tell me about your work and tell me about your friends and tell me how you are. Tell me if your place is okay or tell me about

the music you're listening to. Tell me about Daria's place and what you guys have been doing. You can even tell me about your boyfriends if you want. I wanna know all those things because I wanna know about you. I wanna know anything you wanna say.

Bill I just Well I know I wrote a bunch of times in my last letter about how much I loved you and everything. That I would have done anything you wanted. Do you know how much I loved you and how much I wanted you. I guess I just want to write it again in a letter where I'm not being mean to you. I don't know what that means for us now but I loved you so much and I still I think maybe I was always waiting for you to come back.

I wish I could be there with you or something, wherever you are. I hate to think about you being alone somewhere. Well I know you're not alone because you're at your friend's place but I wish I could be there with you. I really wish I could be there with you.

Please write me when you can.

Yours if you still want me,

Steve

March 30th, 1996

Steve,

Hey thank you for getting back to me so quickly. I'm writing you back as soon as I can too. This is probably gonna be a big mess too because I don't know what I wanna say either.

Steve I guess I just wanna say sorry again. I hate thinkin about you being upset over me or something. Please don't be upset over me. I figured you wouldn't have known anything about it all. I never wanted to tell you or to tell you in a stupid letter of all things.

Everything that you wrote means a lot to me. I just want you to know that. I sat here cryin over your last couple letters and I sat here cryin over this one too like a fucking wuss. Reading your letter made me

feel better in a way but it made me feel fuckin terrible too. I hate thinkin that I made you upset even if you aint mad at me no more. I'm so sorry about everything.

I dunno if this is gonna be a real good letter or not. I didn't think you was gonna write back to me anymore. You know when I wrote you all my other love notes I always had a ton of shit to say because I'd be thinkin all week about what stupid crap I wanted to say to you. But I really didn't think you'd wanna write to me again. It means a lot to me that you did.

I'm sorry that I made you get into a fight with your old man. You can tell me about it if you want. I hope that he wasn't a prick to you about me but I'm kinda guessing that he was. You know I never wanted to come between you and your family. I guess I can admit that I've always thought your dad was for shit but I know you always looked up to him and all. I know you always tried real hard for him. I thought that maybe you'd hate me for makin him disappointed in you.

Steve I know you wouldn't have wanted me to go. I think that's why I felt so fuckin horrible this whole time. Well I would have felt horrible no matter what. I guess I was real scared about what you might be givin up for me. You know we never fought as much as the kids liked to joke about but we got into some big ones before I guess. I know I'm not exactly the easiest person to get along with. All my friends here got jokes about it. Bet I was even worse back then.

I know I could be a real piece of shit to you sometimes. I just couldn't bear thinkin about you givin up your family and your school and all that shit for me. I just kept thinkin about what coulda happened between us, like maybe if it ended bad between us after all that. And maybe you woulda resented me. I thought I was doin the best thing for you but I was just being a scared idiot.

I just want you to know that. I want you to know I'm an idiot and I always wanted you.

Steve I can't believe you thought I was ignoring you for a month and you were sending me all these letters and worrying about me. I keep reading the shit you wrote me. You weren't an asshole. Even though

you thought I fucked off on you again you were still worrying about me. Do you know how special you are. You were always thinkin about everyone else and not yourself and I loved that about you. You still do the same thing.

You were always such a goddamn sweetheart. You were my sweetheart, you remember I used to call you that? Is it ok if I say that I dunno if it's ok if I say that. You know I missed you so much man and I thought about you all the time. I dunno if it's ok to say that either. You always made me feel good, I want you to know that.

Ok I think I'll stop now or else I'll keep on sayin shit to you. Do you know the kinda stuff I wanna write to you Steve. Do you know what I was thinkin about when I saw you the other month or what I wanted to do to you. I don't know if that's ok. If you just wanna be friends with me that's all right too you just let me know. But I'll try and stop for now.

You know the other day I got the fuckin birthday present you sent me too. I guess you sent it out a while ago cause this letter's addressed different. Steve how the fuck did you even get that Alice in Chains record it ain't even out yet. I was listenin to it all night and pissing Daria off.

Thank you so much man. It feels good to be 29.

You told me to write regular stuff and to tell you about what I've been up to. I guess I still don't know really what to write. I still kinda feel like writin to you is a dream or something.

Well I tried to call you right before I started writing this but nobody picked up. Maybe that's ok because I don't really know where I stand with you and I wouldn't have known what to say to you anyway. It's Friday night so I might've just missed you. Daria's got a date tonight so I said I'd watch the kid. He ate a lot of chicken nuggets and passed out on me. I hope it's ok to write you about this boring shit.

I forgot that you wouldn't have had D's number or anything. I'll send it with this letter. I'm still staying at her place and I feel like a real layabout for it. I keep tryin to give her money and she says it's ok. Well she cornered me tonight asking me about babysitting to help her

out so I guess that was her plan all along.

Anyway Steve I'm fine and everything. You know me, I'm always ok. Don't worry about me. No I didn't get hurt in the storm or anything. Sorry I forgot to answer that until now. I wasn't at home, I was at work like an idiot at the diner. We all actually got stuck there for the night. It was kinda freaky really because you can see the ocean from where the place is at and it looked like we were gonna get hit by a tidal wave or some shit. Obviously that didn't happen. We don't usually get any big storms like that out here. Even now some of the lights are out around town and a buncha rich people's boats in the harbor got all smashed up.

And yeah I didn't write to you about my dog dyin before and I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd wanna hear about it. He just was like my I feel really bummed out about it and all. I feel really bad about it because I shoulda taken him to the vet sooner. He seemed ok on a Monday when I left for work. He was staying on the couch like he usually was and he wagged his tail real hard at me when I left. Then when I came home I couldn't find him nowhere and he was dead in the fuckin bathroom.

Well I took him to the vet anyway to cremate him and they told me he had a buncha tumors in his stomach (not from the socks). Said there prolly wasn't too much I could do but I still feel like total shit about it. I hope he was kinda happy with me.

That's kinda a downer so I'm sorry. I miss him I guess. Maybe that sounds stupid. But I've been feeling okay since I've been staying with Daria and all. Every night we watch a stupid romantic comedy when the kid goes to bed. Do you know I've watched Jerry Maguire three times this month. Maybe it's forward of me to say this but Steve you complete me. Do you know the line to say back to me? Ok i'm done.

Well you asked me to tell you about my friends but I haven't been out too much. I've been trying to save my money because I don't know if I'll have to get a new place or not. They're working on my apartment building but I dunno how long it'll take. I can't crash here forever. But my and Daria's friend Ryan is gonna come over here on Sunday night so we can make dinner together. Usually she has really good pot. Next week I might go out to a drag show to see some of my

queens. But I might have to get real drunk to deal with that shit and I dunno if I feel like getting real drunk. They always play so much Prince. I guess we'll see. I'm not gonna tell you about my boyfriends cause I don't have any boyfriends Steve. I've only been thinkin about you.

Anyway let me know how you are. Tell me some stuff about you. Tell me whatever you want because I want to know about you too. Next time I'll write you something better. We can just talk as friends if you want. You know you said before that you were on a plane to go to Illinois, why'd you go out there? Did you get another job for your work or did you go out to visit Ali and MARVIN? Tell me about that.

Yeah I still want you. You big idiot. I love you. I wish I could be there with you too.

Yours,

Billy

April 5th, 1996

Hey Bill I'm so glad to hear back from you. I didn't know if you were gonna get my letter or if you were still staying at your friend Daria's place. I guess I'll keep sending you stuff there until I hear otherwise.

I think we keep missing each others' phone calls. I called for you on Wednesday night but your friend Daria answered and she told me you had just left and were working late. I talked to her for a couple minutes so I hope that's ok.

She didn't really sound like I expected her to. The way you talk about her I guess I was picturing this real tough lady. But she sounded about eighteen years old. She was really nice. I could hear her kid hooting in the background like a bird, does he do that a lot?

You know you can call me whenever you want. It doesn't matter if it's like one in the morning where I am. I don't know if you remember but I still don't really sleep very good well.

Bill I don't want you to be upset about me and my dad. It doesn't matter about him. I think this fight between me and him has been a long time coming. We didn't just fight about you. Well ok a lot of it was about you but a lot of it was about me and him. He only ever cared about me when he thought it was something bad I was doing. And you know he had some not so great things to say about me. I guess it made me feel pretty shitty. He said that I'm a disgrace ungrateful and that everything he ever did was for his family. I don't really see how cheating on my mom was for his family. I don't see how him getting rid of the one person who ever made me really happy was for his family.

You and me keep saying sorry to each other and I think we should stop. I don't think you're an idiot. I know that I wrote in my last letter that I wouldn't have let you leave and I do mean that. But I guess what I'm trying to say is I really mean it now because I haven't had y seen you in eight years. I hope I would have meant that back when I was 21 too. But honestly I don't really know what I would have done back then. I would have been scared too. Maybe I would have been an idiot too.

I hope that makes sense. Maybe it doesn't have to matter anymore, but maybe we should stop saying sorry. Actually maybe we don't even have to go into it anymore for now. I made myself sick thinking about you for so long. Now I just wanna talk about normal stuff like we've been talking about. Not how everything got all screwed up. Is that ok? I hope you say yes. Because I'm so glad that I have you back, even if you're really far away or whatever.

You know some of the things that you write to me make me feel really stupid inside, I mean not in a bad way. I wish I could write the way that you do. You make me feel like a kid with a crush or something. You make me so You don't have to talk to me like we're just friends. I don't think I could ever be just friends with you.

I remember how you used to call me sweetheart or baby. You can still call me that if you want. You know you were the only person who ever called me stuff like that. You can tell me what you were thinking about me over New Years if you want. I want you to tell me. I was thinking about you too. I wanted to be alone with you and not in Mike's kitchen. I thought about you all night after you left the

party. I really missed you too.

Bill you know I was thinking about you all the time and worrying about you because I care about you. I guess I'm always thinking about you too. I'm not really special or whatever like you said. I just want you.

I'm glad that you got the CD I sent you and that you liked it. It's kind of a stupid present but I figured you would like it. I got it because one of the girls I work with, her brother works for that big Columbia record company. She got me one of their promo CDs for you. Sorry cause I would of wanted to get you a vinyl but I didn't wanna push my luck asking for more free shit.

On another note I'm really sorry to hear about your place. Do you think you'll move back there or will you go somewhere new? Let me know if you need something ok? I know you probably won't but the offer's there. I hope that you get to move back home soon. Is your stuff ok? Please tell me your really bright couch is ok.

I'm really sorry to hear about your dog too. I've never had a pet but I can imagine how much it sucks to lose one. It sounds like you did about everything you could of done. It sounds like you gave him a lot of socks and a lot of car rides. Did he ever go in your truck with you?

It makes me glad to hear about you watching romantic comedies with your friend Daria. I hope you guys got some really good pot too. I remember when you and me went to see The Princess Bride and you were a real sappy nerd about it. I think that was the last thing we ever saw together. What's your favorite movie you've seen since we were together? I bet it was Terminator 2 because I remember how much you loved the first movie. I bet you cried at it since you have been mentioning how much you've been crying in these letters. You know I hate to think about you crying but its ok if it's over Arnold S and not about me. I bet you cried really hard when he went into the lava pit and gave Eddie Furlong that thumbs up. Linda Hamilton got really ripped too.

Well Bill speaking of Jerry Maguire I've seen that about five times and I do know what line you want me to say back to you. I think you want me to tell you to shut up and I think you want me to say You

had me at hello. You know I was gonna say to you that if I got you on the phone. You're so frickin stupid, you make me laugh. But I'm not sure it's fair that I get to be the blonde lady in this exchange. I think I should get to be Tom Cruise and I should get to tell you that you complete me.

I guess I have to say that I'm glad you're not telling me about any boyfriends. I've only been thinking about you too. You know I really like to hear about your friends but I guess I don't know what to say back about them. Are you really friends with a bunch of drag queens that listen to Prince? Honestly they sound like my kinda people but I don't know what to say about them. I don't really know anybody like that around here. I'm sure there's people like that around here but I don't know them. I still don't know a single gay person around here and I definitely don't know anybody who's into guys and girls aside from me. There was one girl I was with for a little bit, I told her about you and she got kind of weird with me after that. I guess she maybe thought I was gay or something. You know it's not like I asked her to put a finger up my ass or anything. The heart wants what it wants I guess.

I haven't really been doing too much aside from working a lot like usual and getting drunk with Dustin. I did not go out to Illinois to see Ali and MARVIN, I did get to see her though which was really cool. I was still about two hours from where she lives but we met up and got drinks. She asked about how you were again, she was really excited to hear we were talking again.

But yeah I was out there for my work. I don't know if you remember when I said we had two big things coming up, well this is the second one. The one we had the big meeting about, when I spilled coffee on myself on my birthday. Well we got it after all. It's not a high-rise or anything but I'll get to help design it. We go out there again next week but I'll try to write you something before then. I don't really know why they need me to go out there too, maybe for comic relief. Then after that it's back to Idaho for our other project.

Well I guess I should end this letter, I spent most of the night writing it. I wish I could think up some really nice sappy shit to say to you. Just know that I'm thinking about you like I usually am. Write me back really soon ok?

Yours,

Steve

April 11th, 1996

Hey Steve,

Well I'm finally movin back to my place next week and I'm pretty excited. You can write me back at my old address from now on. I'm sad to report to you that yeah my couch got pretty fucked up. So did some other shit like my coffee table and some of my kitchen stuff. And I appreciate it of course but no I don't need nothin. You know they had to fix my place up and paint it all fancy again. Now that it actually looks good maybe I should spend my money on some actual nice furniture or something.

It's ok if you don't want to talk about your dad and it's ok if you don't want to talk about all the bad stuff from before. I'm totally fine with that I think that sounds great really. I will try to stop saying sorry to you. And I know what you mean about not being sure of what you woulda done back then. If something like that had happened now there'd be no way I ever would have left you. Cause I know myself better now. But that's the last thing I'll say about it ok.

Steve I'll try to call ya again this weekend but I ain't calling you on a Sunday night or a weeknight at one AM when you gotta work the next day. I don't usually work on the weekends so I'll try to call you. But I don't expect you to be waitin around all weekend for me.

Daria said you sounded real nice on the phone too. She said you were really funny too so I said 'I don't know who you must of been talking to' and got smacked. And yeah her kid does go off making his weird noises a lot. He's got a lot of energy. If you act like a monster or a tiger he thinks you're about the best. Obviously I'm the most best by the way.

You know Daria said she doesn't believe I don't even got a picture of you or nothin. Maybe you could send me one, if that's ok. Not one of

those real sexy pictures that I used to take of you but like a normal one so I could show you off. But you can send me a real sexy one too if you like. Actually oh please send me a real sexy one Steve I won't show nobody.

You know baby you looked so good when I saw you last August and you looked so good when I saw you over New Years too. You know I could die looking at you. Except I don't really wanna die because I wanna do stuff to you. When I look at you it's like one of those lame fuckin music videos or something, it feel like everything goes in slow motion. That's how I feel about you I guess, totally stupid.

I wanted to be alone with you too over New Years and not in Wheeler's kitchen with his fat fuck of a dad singing Christmas carols out in the living room. I wanted to take you home with me Steve. Well not home because I was stayin at Max's shitty apartment. We woulda had to get a hotel or something. That would have been a bad idea since I had to leave at 7 in the morning. But I wanted to go off with you. I would have tried it if Max hadn't puked her guts everywhere.

I dunno how much you want me to say in a stupid letter when you're 2500 miles away, I looked it up. But I had a lot of thoughts about you and what I wanted to do to you. I hope it's ok if I tell you. Let's say I got you alone somewhere. You know probably some shitty motel like we used to stay in, like a Motel 6 or a Super 8.

Well first I'd tell you how much I missed you, if you'd wanna hear about that. I'd put my hands in your gorgeous fucking hair and tell you about it. Then I'd kiss your pretty mouth for about an hour real slow. Maybe two hours actually cause I missed you so much and all. You could make some of your pretty noises. You know I always loved kissing you. Then I'd spend a while getting your clothes off cause that's the fun part. I'd kiss you about everywhere baby, really I just wanna get my mouth all over you Steve. I wanna see if you still taste the same. I'd do whatever you want. Then after I did all that and let you boss me around for a while maybe you could do me if you want, I don't know if you still want to do that stuff.

You know you always did me so good, you always fucked me just like I wanted. I never had nobody do me like you did. You were always so

good to me. I think about you all the time like that. Well you could do me however you wanted. Then we could lay around and kiss some more and you'd let me just look at you. That's what I was thinkin about in my New Years fantasy. But it ain't really a perfect fantasy because then I'd have to get up and go. If it was really perfect then I wouldn't have to leave ya again.

Well shit I spent about a whole page writing you this junk. I hope it's ok that I wrote that to you. You did say you wanted me to tell you baby. You told me I could call you that too. And you are special Steve. Just let me fuckin tell you you're special. I already know what you're gonna write back and no I don't mean in the slow way.

Steve I guess if you wanna be Tom Cruise then ok I'll be that blonde girl and all. You know we had that joke about me being the girl anyway because of those stupid questions Henderson was always askin us. In the name of science remember. I think Dustin is just a little pervert. And you'd get all pissed off about it and say no one's the girl, that's the point of bein with a guy. I guess it is the point huh.

You know you're still a real asshole to me, I dunno why you wanna go off teasing me about The Terminator like you ain't know its the best movie of all time. This is some shit that we'd get into a real big fight about back in the day. For your information I've seen T2 bout 8 times and I didn't even cry once you little brat. Actually I'll probably watch it tonight now.

Another thing that we'd get into a fight about is you being so down on yourself all the time. I bet your work doesn't want you to go back out there for comic relief. I bet they want you to go out there because you're really good at your job, you dummy. Seems like everybody there likes you a whole lot, especially if you've got girls givin you FREE CDs man. You got connections baby I love a man with connections. I don't need a vinyl you dork. A CD is just fine for me. Thanks again.

You know you never told me what you're gonna be building out there in Illinois. I know the other place was a big shopping mall. I'm glad that you got to go out and see Ali though. Aside from you she's one of the few people from back out there that I miss a whole bunch. I hope she's been doing good and all. Does she still dye her hair all those

crazy colors?

Steve you're real funny. I've got like one pretty good friend who's a big queen, sometimes he just looks like a regular guy too. I still don't really understand too much about that stuff but you know me. But people can do whatever they want and that's cool. I bet you do know some gay people and just don't know it, I remember before you said that you never really knew that I was queer either. Well I'm pretty queer, I hope that's ok. It ain't like it's totally different out here, I just don't hide it anymore. I will say that it does feel different when you're around a bunch of people who know about you and are the same like you. It feels good I guess. You know I bet you'd like my friends and they'd like you, probably more than they like me. Ha ha. Good for me because then you could do all the talkin and I could listen to Prince.

And Jesus you're too corny man, you make me laugh. The heart wants what it wants. Bet I could give you what you want Steve.

Anyway I'll try and call ya again before I move out of Daria's place. I dunno when I'll be all set up back at my place. Write me soon and let me know how you are and what you've been doing. I miss ya a whole bunch.

Yours,

Billy

April 22nd, 1996

Hey Bill!

It looks like we finally got our telephone game figured out. It was great to be able to talk to you two nights in a row last week.

Well I'm back out in IL. and I'm pretty sure you said Monday was the day you were finally going back to your place. I hope you got yourself a bunch of fancy furniture. I know you won't have your phone set up for couple weeks so here's a letter from me from all the way out in Springfield. I don't know how good its gonna be, its really

late here now.

You know I read your last letter again while I was on the plane and I probably shouldn't have done that. I probably looked like a total geek or a weirdo staring at a sheet of paper like I wanted to frickin eat it or something. Jesus Billy you make me feel like a horny teenager or something. I can barely even write this. I bet you know how you make me feel. I can't believe you wrote all that.

I wanted to do those things with you too in January. I mean I still want to. I want you to do all those things to me that you wrote about. You make me crazy thinking about you, I wish you could be here with me or something. You know I even remember the way you smell and everything. And yes I still want to do you, you know how stupid I feel sitting here and writing that. It's not stupid when you write it though. If When I see you again I don't want to just screw you or whatever but we can do that stuff if you want. I mean I want to.

Bill I'd feel really stupid sending you some naked picture you took of me when I was like 20, I don't think I really look like that anymore. Well I feel stupid about this too but here are a couple regular, not very sexy, pictures of me if you want them. I just realized Dustin is in 3 of them and he's eating something in each one so its really not very sexy huh. I think the most recent one is from this past Christmas. You should send me something too.

I want to write you a whole big thing of what I've been doing but I'm so fried right now. I really wish I could call you and you could talk to me til I fell asleep like the other week. We've been so busy this whole time out in Springfield. I had to sign about a million papers today and read a million (long) things and talk to about a million people. We already started drawing up the blueprints and everything right on-site. We are building a huge office complex like where I work in. Not a high-rise but a couple stories. A medium-rise I guess. Ha ha. It's a lot of technical stuff so far and city-planning.

I never wished I was 20 again more. I miss you really bad, I guess that sounds silly because I havent even been around you. I remember back when I had to take that stupid Econ class and I did my internship that last summer and I'd always get a headache and be a huge asshole to everybody. You'd always be so nice to me. You used

to let me put my head in your lap and you'd watch the TV on mute while I'd go off about my professors. Well if I was there now I'd put my head in your lap and go off about the million dumb people I had to be nice to today.

I guess I just keep thinking about you and I really wish I could see you. Not because of all that sexy stuff you were writing but I just wanna see you and be with you.

You talked about wanting to come back out here at the end of summer but I dunno if I can wait that long. I don't know if you were serious before but I was thinking maybe I could come out and see you. Sorry to write this to you in a letter but it's not like I can call you right now.

Well I'll be back home soon and in two weeks I go back to Idaho for a couple days to check on our other building. I was thinking if it's okay with you maybe I could come out there for a weekend or something, I mean to where you're at in Washington. I really feel like I need to see you. I could take a train or a bus out to Seattle or Tacoma and then I could go back on a plane to Richmond, maybe take a Monday off. I don't have to stay with you if you don't want. I could get a fancy hotel or something. I just feel like we've lost so much time and I really want to see you. We could do whatever you want.

Let me know what you think. I'm sorry it's short notice and all but I really want it'd be so great to see you. Or we could try to do some other time if you want that's fine too. I'd love to meet all your friends and everything. I'll try and write you some more later this week when it's not so crazy here.

Yours,

Steve

April 26th, 1996

Hey Steve are you serious would you really wanna come out here? Of course I want you to come out here. You fuckin jerk you really wanna

send me that kinda letter the one week I don't have a goddamn phone in my house.

You can come out here whenever you want man. It's not too short notice. You can stay with me don't worry about it. I don't want you to have to stay in some hotel. Unless you wanted to or something but it's fine if you wanna stay with me. I mean I want you to.

I don't work the weekends anyway I can take off a Monday and a Friday if you wanna come out here. I'll take you around and we can do whatever you want. I'd love to see you Steve I'd really love it. We can stay out in the city one night if you want or we can go to the beach or we can go out to the mountains. I'll even take you to the fuckin Space Needle if you want. Or you wanna go out to a night club with me, I remember you always wanted to do that back when we were kids and I was a dick about it. I'll take you out now. You can meet my friends if you want or we could stay around my place or we can go out wherever.

Shit I really wanna see you. I didn't know if you'd wanna come out here or not. I guess by the time you get this maybe I'll have my fucking phone set up. I'll call you and we can work it out.

I really wanna see you Steve. You can come out here whenever you want. Thank you for the pictures and you look fucking great (Dustin, not so much – ha!) but I really wanna see you for real. You made my week writin me this.

Yours,

Billy

7. Part Seven

Part Seven

May 21st, 1996

Hey hotshot well I finally found your wristwatch under the couch so I'm sending it back out to you right away. Funny cause we got up to a lot on that couch but I don't exactly remember your watch flyin off during it. ha ha. You also left a couple a t shirts but I guess you'll have to come back if you want those.

I can't send you a big letter right now because I'm runnin late for work I just want you to have your watch before you get on another plane. Guess I can't stop myself from writin you a love note. I'll write more next time.

Hope you didn't get in any trouble at your job for stayin here an extra day. Maybe by the time you get this we'll have again talked already, I hope so. I miss ya already.

Thank you for coming out and seeing me Steve. Hope you had a good time with me too. If you come out again we can do more stuff. Sorry my place was so small and sorry about my friends doing that big thing, I didn't know they were gonna do all that party shit. I still have a lot of booze which is cool. Your biggest fan Gabriel is already askin me when my 'special friend' is comin back.

You know I love you a lot man. I hated seeing you go. Talk to you soon.

Yours,

Billy

May 30th, 1996

Hey Bill!

I know we talked a couple days ago but you said you wanted a letter from me so here it is. I like writing you these letters anyway. I guess it's our thing now or something. Not sure if that's too corny for you, ha ha.

Thanks a lot for sending for my watch, I guess I do kinda need it. You know Carly at my work has been trying to cunvi convince me to get a cellular phone for a while. She says they have the time on them too. I like my watch though, I already had to get a pager a couple years ago. When I said the thing about the pager she gave me this look that made me feel real old and out of it. But if I got a cellular it would be easier for us to talk when I go on these stupid business trips.

Bill I love you too. It feels weird to write it in a letter but I should of said it when I was with you. And I thought we did enough stuff, I even got to see the ocean for the first time. I didnt care about going places, I wanted to see you. I miss you a lot and I keep thinking about you. It even almost sucks to just talk to you on the phone now. It feels weird to be back at home.

Your apartment is great and not too small. It's way better than the place I had a couple years ago. I really liked those lights you had up in your room. And that new couch, well, its really sturdy. Don't say sorry about your friends because it was really fun. I really liked meeting them all. Ok - they could have cleared out a little earlier. What do you think they thought we were going to do when they left, play cards? Ha ha.

I was glad to get to meet Daria especially and I loved meeting Gabriel, you know I think that's the most anybody's ever asked me about my job! He does have a lot of Legos. Tell him when he finishes his new 'building' I'd love to see a picture of it. I'd like a picture of you too if thats ok.

I wanted to write you even sooner but work's been really crazy again. I guess it will keep being crazy for a while. Oh and don't worry I didn't get any shit for taking an extra day off, I have lots of time I never use. They made me lead person for the job in IL. actually so that's exciting, I guess. I'd rather still be with you. I have to get on another plane tonight so if you write me I probably won't get it for a while. I hope I'll get to talk to you soon, I'll try and call from my

hotel.

I still have sand in my jeans from that night we went to the beach. There is sand in my suitcase too and I don't know how that's possible. I can't believe you can just pull your truck right up on the beach, thanks for letting me drive it! I know that's a big thing for you. I loved being out there with you. And hey what was the name of that album we listened to in your room? You know which night. It was the Cure right? I keep thinking of this one song from it, about the pictures.

Let me know what you've been doing and how you are. Write me soon even if I get to call you.

Yours,

Steve

June 8th, 1996

Hey Steve,

Thanks for writing to me so fast. I don't think it's corny if it's our thing. Here's a big envelope for ya because Gabriel wanted to send some crazy blueprints he drew up. I don't know what the fuck this shit's supposed to be but of course I said it looked great. He made me make a copy and everything. Now he says he don't want to be a dinosaur expert but maybe an architect. I told him you would look over the dimensions for him, ha ha, so have fun with that. And that record you asked about is by The Cure, I sent it along too. Hope it doesn't get smashed up.

Steve I miss ya and I keep thinking about you. I had a big stupid grin on my face all last week and my boss at the shop told me I look like a fuckin jackass. Then he said it was nice that I was happy for once. I wish I could be with you.

Here's a picture of me since you asked for one. There's one of the pictures that Daria took of us at her apartment too, look how good you look baby. I'm glad you didn't mind that we went to her place

and all. She really wanted to come with me to meet ya. I think she wanted to make sure I didn't fuck it up right away. Guess it went ok.

All my friends liked you too Steve. Actually I prolly need to tell some of em to back off, you know which ones. I always loved to watch you at a party. I forgot about it. You got this great smile and you can make conversation with just about anyone over just about anything. People always like being around you, I know I do.

Well it's been about two weeks since I seen ya and I can almost walk normal again. You can really go man. I dunno what the fuck those shitheads thought we wanted to do for our last night together, well what was supposed to be our last one anyway. I know what I wanted to do, guess I got it. I miss you and your huge amazing gorgeous cock Steve. Guess I miss your face too. I think about you all the time.

I guess this will be kind of a short letter. I don't really got too much to say for once, think I told you most of what I've been up to the other night. I'm glad to hear about your job, tell me about it if you want. You didnt say too much on the phone. Is that one guy you work with still being a dick to you? You might have to go full King Steve on him and kick his ass.

I started working some extra shifts at the shop, my boss is startin to fix up motorcycles too. It's a lot of extra cash since I get paid by the job. I was thinkin of when I can come back out there, maybe for longer than a week for once. I guess Sinclair's getting hitched cause I got a fancy card from him in the mail. I dunno if I can wait til October to see you again though. Wanna be my plus-one? And you can drive my truck anytime.

I love you Steve. I hope I get to talk to ya this week. And tell your mom happy birthday for me, I think it's coming up.

Yours,

Billy

June 22nd, 1996

Hey Bill,

I came back home to a letter from you which cheered me up! Thanks so much for the pictures of us and for the record, you didn't have to do that. I already started playing it. And well I have to say that those blueprints look pretty ace, I put them in my desk along with my other important paperwork. You can tell Gabriel that I think the only issue is he can definitely add more towers, maybe 3 or 4. I can't believe he can spell and stuff already or did you guys help him?

I can't believe it's been a whole month since I've seen you. You know I was so nervous to go out there and that seems kind of silly now. I have probably had a big stupid smile on my face too. Some of the guys at my work have asked if I met a girl or something. Oh well. They don't need to know everything.

I miss your face too, and the rest of you. I miss touching you. Is that stupid to say since I only got four days with you. And you're funny, Bill. That's a really nice way of saying that I'm a goddamn motormouth, I bet that's what you would of said when we were kids. And well those are a lot of adjust adjectives about my cock, I don't really think it's that special or anything. I mean I'm glad you enjoy it. Really glad. But you know there's such a thing as too big. Sometimes I feel like I look like a cartoon character or something. You look amazing though. I bet you know that.

Well I'm back home for a week at least (I hope) so I'll be calling you. I guess I just want to write a while longer though. It's Friday night here and I don't think I'll really sleep tonight even though I was just on a plane for 4 hours. Tomorrow I get to go back home for the town fair with Dustin. He has a new girlfriend and he's real nervous about taking her out. I told him he could woo her at the pie eating contest, he still doesn't think I'm too funny.

Speaking of going back home, I'm surprised you remembered my mom's birthday. I did tell her happy birthday for you and she says thanks. She is turning 55 again, by the way. Well I went back home to have dinner with her and me and my dad got into another shouting match, I guess I still feel kind of annoyed by that. I didn't really mean to get into it with him but you know me and my mouth. Mind you I didn't know my dad was going to be there but I guess my

mom thought she was being real tricky. The only reason I didn't go off even more was for my mom. Happy birthday to her.

I can't even remember why he brought it up but you know how my dad loves to mention all the money he spends. He got my mom some new ring and he made a crack about how it almost cost as much as my car did. So we got into it over that. Stupid shit. I told him if he's still hurting over it five years later that I could give him the money back for it, that started him up about how ungrateful I am. Now I guess we're not talking even more. That's fine with me. I guess I shouldn't complain. Maybe I should be thankful, I don't know. I mean I am I just wish things were different.

Well I don't want to be too boring and talk about my job too much but it's been really slow going with the new building. It's just me out there and two of the girls Carly and Annika and this guy Tom. And yes he's still being a dick to me. I mean he's kind of being a dick to everyone and I don't really get his problem. He was always cool with me before. It just seems like he doesn't like anyone's ideas and we can't make any progress. His suggestions are not so great but I don't really want to be the one to shut him down. But I guess I have to be since I am lead and all. I'm trying not to be an asshole. The things he wants to do with the building aren't really sustainable and also well they just don't look good. We all have to sign off on it and then push it through to get it approved soon so I guess we have to have it out.

Sorry because I feel like this letter is just a lot of complaining. I like to do that, if you remember. But I guess it's not very romantic. I'll try to write something better next time. I hope I can get you on the phone tomorrow.

I guess you've been at work a lot too. I didn't know you knew how to fix motorcycles, do you ever ride them? At the risk of sounding like my grandma I hope you wear a helmet. I can't believe Lucas is really getting married – I guess he and Jenn have been dating for a while. She's a nice kid, I think he met her through Mike. Of course I'll be your plus-one. I'd love to see you again before October though, I'm trying to see if I can get more time off before the summer's over. I dunno if you would want me to come out there again.

Well I don't really know what else to say aside from I miss you, want

to be with you, wish we were doing it right now, all that gushy stuff. It's almost midnight here and I wonder what you're doing. I hope you're doing something fun, maybe not too fun. Let me know how you are and how your friends are. Is Daria still dating that guy HAROLD that I met? As usual I'm thinking of you.

Yours,

Steve

July 2nd, 1996

Steve,

I'm sorry to hear you got into it with your old man again. You may figure I've got some choice things to say about him but since I care about you I've decided not to run my mouth. But I don't think you're being ungrateful about your dad. It pisses me off to hear about him saying shit like that to you. You know parents are supposed to do shit for their kids and not hold it over their heads. In a perfect world I guess. Screw giving him money for your car man, a gift's a gift. I'm sure he ain't hurtin' that bad for money if he just bought your mom's a ring. If I were you I'd sell the car and get something I really liked, keep the rest of the cash for a rainy day.

I guess it's lucky for both of us that you're not like me. I hope you can work it out with your old man or figure out what you wanna do about him. Guess I feel like I caused you problems with him, I don't want to be doing that.

Well we talked a little bit about your job on the phone and I gotta say again I think you're being a little naive honey. Don't feel bad because it's one of your best qualities. Has it ever crossed your mind that this guy you work with is probably just jealous or pissed off because you got control over the project out there and not him? I know you said that he'd been at the company for a while longer than you. He probably feels stupid cause you're better than him. I think you need

to tell him what's up. I know you can be real bossy when you want to baby.

Steve you know you're about the only person on the planet who would be embarrassed about having a huge porn star cock. I dunno what kinda cartoons you been watching but I think I can say pretty confidently that you don't look like one of 'em. And you know what you do have a goddamn motormouth sometimes but that wasn't what I meant. I was trying to give you a compliment Harrington. Sometimes I know how to do that now. I'll keep tryin.

I miss you too and I don't really wanna wait til October to see you again. It's pretty hard for me to be away from you, you know what a big whiny bitch I am. Hey you know any time you wanna come back out here, I'd love to have you. I could show you around my jobs, or since it's summer I could actually take you around now. Or I could come down there and see you, I wouldn't mind hangin out with Max and Susan again either. Be nice to see El's little girl, I bet by October she'll be talkin and everything. I don't really got much time to take off though since I already put in for Sinclair's fancy wedding. You know I'm not loaded like you But I could come out there if you want. Let me know when you're finished your big project so you'll be back in town.

It's summer now and I wish you were out here with me. Last weekend I got to go camping and you would of really liked it. We got a lot of festivals coming up but I'm not sure if I'll make it out to them, Daria'll have to go without me. I'll probably end up babysitting for her, she and HAROLD are still going strong. He seems like a nice enough guy so I've been trying not to make fun of him too much. You know that's hard for me too. I got another letter from Henderson and I'm tryin to be nice to him too. I hope it works out with him and his girl.

I haven't really been doin too much since I've been working a lot and Daria's off with her new guy. A lotta my other friends and people I hang around with still like to go to the bars and hook up but I guess that's kinda boring to me. I'm just a sad slacker drinkin my beer and thinkin about you. Not that sad cause if you're thinkin about me too then it's ok. Guess I'll just be waitin around with my PICTURES OF YOU (get it).

Anyway I love you and all. Guess I keep saying it but I miss you. I wanna be with you. Call me or write me soon, ok?

Yours,

Billy

August 6th, 1996

Hey man I haven't heard from you in a couple weeks and I can't get you on the phone so I was just worrying thinking about you. You sounded kinda down the last time I talked to you, lemme know if you're okay and all. If I said somethin or you're changin your mind about me it's ok I just Just let me know what's up, how you are and all. I figure you're probably workin a lot but let me know how you are. If you can't call me just send me somethin if you have time.

Yours,

Billy

August 14th, 1996

Hey Billy,

I'm so sorry I haven't been around. Work has been totally nuts and I caught the flu which knocked me out for about two weeks. Dustin and one of the girls from my job almost took me to the hospital, instead I was just nearly nagged to death. There was like three or four days where I came home at 4 and just slept right until the next morning when I had to leave for work. I barely even remember it.

Anyway thats not much of an apology. I just have been feeling I'm really sorry. I guess I feel really overworked or stressed or something. Dustin says that's probably why I got sick and he read me two science articles about stress ulcers. I didnt have an ulcer, I had the flu because he sneezed on me and drank out of my beer glass all night the other week. Also him writing you another letter is really scary to

me, what are you guys writing about???

You know when I first got this job the company was a lot smaller and I thought it'd be really cool that I got to travel sometimes. It was cool for the first like four or five plane trips and now it's just a lot. It's a lot of work. All I've done for 4 years is be at work. That was ok before when I didn't have something I wanted. And now this thing with you happened and I can't see you like I want and it sucks. I don't know what to do. I've been working so much I can't even call you when I say. I'm really sorry about it. I know you have work and stuff too. I don't want you to put yourself out for me.

I guess the main thing that happened is that guy I told you about Tom dropped out of our project. Well he got fired really. He is a piece of shit like you said before. It was this big thing and we almost ended up dropping out of the contract when he left.

Apparently he'd been making passes at the girls which had been going on a long time. I mean not just here in IL. They finally told my boss about it and he flew him home right away. I feel bad about it because I didn't know anything like that was going on. The girls told me that's just what happens when you're a girl and you work jobs like that. Any job really they said. That makes me feel bad too.

You know I thought I was pretty good friends with Carly but I can't even tell when she's uncomfortable because some creep is working with us. Or like she didn't even wanna tell me. And I'm the one who pulled her out here cause I wanted her working with me. So maybe I'm not a good person to be friends with, I should be better than that.

I hope I don't make anyone feel uncomfortable. Maybe I should tell the girls that I have a boyfriend so they don't feel like I'm going to hit on them. If you wanna be my boyfriend I mean. Or are we too old for that? I don't know. Anyway all that happened at the end of July and now I'm home for a little bit, it was really crazy. I just got your letters the other day and I'm writing you back as soon as I can.

Bill you know I can read that stuff that you scratch out in these letters right? I'm not 'changing my mind' about you, that's not going to happen. I hate thinking about you worrying about me.

You know I feel kind of stupid writing this in a letter but I guess I thought it was too corny to say on the phone before. I keep thinking about that last day we were together and then the morning when I got on the plane. And we went down that little hallway so we could say goodbye 'properly,' god I really didnt want to leave. And you said you felt like something was gonna happen again and that you didnt want to lose me. Well that could never happen Billy. You could never lose me. I'm yours if you want me. I mean you have to know that.

After we finish out in IL. hopefully things will get less crazy. I don't think we go back out there again and I should be around more. I just have to figure out what to do. You know I loved being out there with you in the city. I probably felt more at home with you at your apartment than I've ever felt in my house. I've been trying to figure out if I can maybe come and see you again before October. But you know my boss says they really need me and you know how I get.

I dont know what to I guess I've never been in a long distance relationship before, if that's what we're doing, I don't know if you want to be in a relationship with somebody all the way across the country. I don't want to freak you out. But I miss you a lot. When I was sick I had a lot of crazy dreams about you, mostly good. It feels like May was so long ago and it almost feels like getting to be with you was a dream or something.

I probably sound stupid because it's been years and we've only spent a couple days together. I don't know what When I was with you I know we're not the same people we were when we were 20 but I feel like I still know you. Theres new stuff too that I want to learn about you, I hope you feel the same way. I don't want to just spend a weekend with you twice a year. I guess I'm nervous that maybe you'll get tired of doing this. I'm sure you want more than a phonecall a week with somebody. You could get whoever you want.

I'm sorry I haven't been around but I can do better now. If you want to go around with other guys until we can figure out what we're doing thats ok Maybe I can take a vacation too in October when you're here or I can come out and see you again. I just really want to see you. I wanna be with you but I dont know what to do about it.

I love you Bill and I hope you're doing ok. I'll be around all weekend

trying to call you. Please write me soon and tell me some good stuff. What shows did you go to see this month? How's Gabriel doing? How's Daria doing with HAROLD? I love you.

Yours still I hope,

Steve

August 21st, 1996

Hey sweetheart well it looks like I have to catch the next flight down there and come kick your ass into gear. You know I can read that shit you scratch out too right pretty boy? I don't want to go around with other guys Steve. I haven't been going around with anybody since before we started talking again. I guess you're stuck with me.

Another thing I'll have to come and kick your ass over is you working too hard, you know you're not supposed to work when you're sick right? I guess you still haven't changed too much. I remember when you had that internship you got real sick and you didn't talk to me for four days because I said you shouldn't go to class.

You know normal people get sick too, you're allowed to not feel ok. When Gabriel was three I caught the chicken pox off him and looked like a goddamn monster for about a month. But I hate thinkin of you being sick, even more so since I can't be there. You know I call you my baby cause I want to take care of you right? That prolly makes you want to throw up or somethin, sorry about that. I hope you're ok now.

Steve I guess we didn't really talk about what we were doin when you came to see me and I guess we haven't really talked about it since. I guess we should try to get better at that.

You can tell people I'm your boyfriend if you want. I mean that's what I want to be. I don't know how to do this either from across the country but we can figure it out. Don't worry about working too much or not being able to call me or anything. I was just worried about you. You know I wanted you when I was 20 and I'll want you

when I'm 40 or 50 too. I'm not gonna get tired of doing this. I'll wait around as long as you want.

I don't want to go around with other guys and I don't want to be with anybody else. I'm sorry if I wrote somethin or said somethin that made you think that. I been in love with you since I was 19 years old. I don't want anybody else. I don't want you to worry about me bein with somebody else. You can't lose me either.

You know if you really wanted me to I could be down there in about a week. It doesn't matter to me I want to be with you. I can find a shitty job in Indiana and I can get a shitty apartment. I could come down there if you want just let me know. I'll do whatever you want man, we can figure it out. But if you want me to come down then I will. Sometimes I want you so bad I can't deal with it.

I'm sorry to hear about all the shit with your job. That sounds really rough. I knew that guy was a fuckin prick but since I love you I'm not going to say I told you so. At any rate I'll restrain myself from writin it. It sounds like you've got it under control now. It sucks to hear about the girls and it pisses me off man. But you shouldn't get yourself all worked up about it. What were you gonna do, beat the guy up in the parking lot? I think you're a great friend to have and I bet your girls would say the same.

You know I hate hearing that you're working too much at your job or that you're stressed out. If you don't like traveling so much, I bet you could find another job at another company where you don't have to do that. I know that shit's easy to say and not to do. And I know you said you like the people you work with. But I bet you could figure somethin out so that you wouldn't have to be on a plane all the time. You know you can do whatever you want man. I just want you to be happy.

Well I really don't have too much to tell you about. I'm really fried right now and I was thinkin about you all week. Bet things would be better if I could wake up next to you again. I've just really been working a lot, I was trying to save up enough money to get a plane ticket to come out and see you. Makes me nervous to see my bank account empty so I had to save a little. If you want though I'll get right in my car Steve. Actually I'd love to take a break for a while.

Last week I took Gabriel out to see this cartoon movie called Balto which has bumped The Lion King out of my top spot for now, but just for now. I was thinking maybe in a couple months I could get a new dog. But I'd need a bigger place and I wanna know what we're doin. And yeah Daria is still going out with Harold. Me and Ryan have been tryin to find a nickname for him that's less terrible. Two weeks ago we took him to our favorite bar, you know the one I took you to. He looked real surprised when Ryan's girlfriend came over and kissed her. Daria said to him 'They're lesbians, Harold' and Harold said 'Huh!' So I guess he's ok. It's 1996 man. Anyway I thought that was funny.

Steve I love you and I hope you're doing ok now. Call me or write me when you get a chance. Don't worry about it, I'll be here.

Yours,

Billy

September 5th, 1996

Billy,

By the time I send this out it'll be a whole year since we started writing to each other. Happy anniversary, ha ha. This might be a pretty short letter because I have to run to work. Not because I'm busy for once but because I slept really late. I can call you again this weekend.

You know we talked on the phone some more but I guess I want to say again that you don't have to do that, move out here I mean. I wouldn't want you to do that. I know you said you would but I don't want you to do that. You've got a whole life out there that's really good for you, your work and your friends and your family. I think you do have a family out there even if you say it's just Max and Susan here. I just want you to be happy too.

Well I took your advice even though I don't think you knew you were givin me advice and I sold my car. I didn't give the money back to my

dad, I bought an old Jeep that sounds really loud but supposedly runs good. When you see it you'll have to tell me if it actually runs good.

We finally closed on our project out in Illinois and I talked to my bosses for a long time. I got a big raise too. At the end of next month I'm gonna take a couple weeks off, maybe three or four. Told you I had a lot of vacation time. I was thinking maybe when you come up here in October, instead of taking a plane back, me and you could spend some time driving back to WA together. If you wanted. We could hit up a bunch of Motel 6's on the way back, see if they have new ugly carpets now. Then I could spend a couple weeks with you and we can go from there. Let me know what you think.

Love, Steve

September 9th, 1996

Steve,

I'm in. Can't wait. I'll check out your Jeep for ya too.

Love you too,

Billy

8. Epilogue

Epilogue

To: sharrington@populousdesigns.co
From: dghenderson@hawkinsms.edu
02/06/1998 8:04am

Subject: My Best Friend Moved To Washington And All I Got Was This T-Shirt

Hey Steve, I'm trying to get in touch with my landlord, I moved into his place about a year ago when he ran off after his boyfriend to WA. Any chance you can put him in contact with me? I need to talk about the washing machine. Say hi to Billy!

PS Mike and El want to know if you're coming to Hannah's 3rd birthday in March, you have a month to get back here!

Dustin G Henderson

'The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.' -- Albert Einstein

To: dghenderson@hawkinsms.edu
From: sharrington@populousdesigns.co
02/06/1998 12:56pm

Subject: Re: My Best Friend Moved To Washington And All I Got Was This T-Shirt

Dustin you fruitcake. How did you get my company email? I only work four days a week now, just call me! And when did you talk to Mike, we called him last week. We already got plane tickets.

Bill says Hi!

To: sharrington@populousdesigns.co

From: dghenderson@hawkinsms.edu

02/06/1998 7:42pm

Subject: Re: Re: My Best Friend Moved To Washington And All I Got Was This T-Shirt

Steve,

Don't worry about how I got your work email. You should get instant messenger, do you have a second landline at home? I called you LAST WEEK and a little kid picked up the phone. Did you guys adopt a baby or something? I guess I'm not as important as MIKE OR ELEVEN.

Also my mom has more stuff to send you guys. I'll tell her to just wait since you're coming home. Can't wait to see you!

Still need to talk about the washing machine. I have a new theory.

Dustin G Henderson

'The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.' -- Albert Einstein

To: Delilah Harrington

8024 Riverbank Ave

Hawkins IN 47238

May 4th, 1998

Hey ma!

Just wanted to write you something to say thanks for visiting last month, we loved having you here. It's a shame that you couldn't have come out a little later, it gets warm really quick around here. We could of taken you to the beach. This month Bill has been teaching

me how to surf. I've only almost drowned about four times! That was a joke, don't worry about me. It was only two times.

Thanks again for all the stuff you got us for our new place, you didn't need to do that. You know how Bill is and he was really nervous about you coming out here but now he won't shut up about visiting you for Christmas. So you have that to look forward to now, ha ha. And you get to see me next month for Dustin's engagement party! Don't let him bother you too much.

It was great to see you ma. Thanks for always being there for me. I miss you!

Love,

Steve

To: kingsteve01@aol.com
From: madmax0724@yahoo.com
07/10/1998 7:22pm

Subject: (no subject)

steve!!!!!!!!!! show me the dog!!!!!!!!!!!!!! billy's too lazy to check his email!!!

To: madmax0724@yahoo.com
From: kingsteve01@aol.com
07/11/1998 10:58am

Subject: Re: (no subject)



Come out and see him for your birthday! We'll send you a ticket!

master of puppets 68 signed on (06:22pm).

master of puppets 68: hey hotshot

master of puppets 68: still at your desk

King Steve 01: Hey Bill :-)

King Steve 01: Yes Sorry I'm almost done here

master of puppets 68: they like your proposal ?

King Steve 01: Yeah they did but everything ran late I'm just printing out paperwork

master of puppets 68: told u they would

King Steve 01: I know you did. It went great.

master of puppets 68: come home

master of puppets 68: i miss u

King Steve 01: I am soon

King Steve 01: 20 min, I promise

King Steve 01: What are you doing, looking at my emails?

King Steve 01: I didn't know you learned how to turn the computer on :-)

master of puppets 68: fuck u
master of puppets 68: come home
King Steve 01: I am! Did you make me dinner?
master of puppets 68: daria ate it
King Steve 01: :-(
master of puppets 68: im joking
master of puppets 68: u get lasagna
King Steve 01: Ok! I'm leaving in 5
master of puppets 68: I bet
King Steve 01: Mary Beth and her boyfriend want to get drinks with us on sunday
King Steve 01: Yes or no?
master of puppets 68: oh my god
master of puppets 68: they talk too much
King Steve 01: Yeah but you'll have drinks
master of puppets 68: fine
King Steve 01: I'll tell her. Ok i'm finished here
King Steve 01: I love you!
master of puppets 68: bye
King Steve 01: Wow. Really?
master of puppets 68: whatever. i love u too
master of puppets 68: are u taking me out tonight
King Steve 01: Of course, its Friday :-)
King Steve 01: Still want to do a movie?
master of puppets 68: yeh
master of puppets 68: I wnna see the 6th sense
King Steve 01: Really? You might get scared...
King Steve 01: Remember the Blair Witch
master of puppets 68: i just didnt want 2 go camping that weeknd
King Steve 01: Okay Bill ...
master of puppets 68: jesus shut up can u hurry up
King Steve 01: Maybe if you stop messaging me :-)
master of puppets 68: bye stevie
King Steve 01 has signed off (6:49pm).

To: Mr. Steve Harrington
2190 Shore Dr
Camano Island WA 98282

January 14th, 1999

Hey Steve!

I'm hoping by the time this card gets to you your birthday hasn't passed already. I BOUGHT IT weeks ago but it's been sitting in my glovebox since then. I thought you'd like the dog on the front.

I know we've been emailing but I just want to say thank you again for looking over all the paperwork I sent you. Robertson really liked the designs that I showed him. I wouldn't exactly say that I got a promotion but I did get a raise and I get to move into your old office!

Everyone at work still misses you but mostly me, OF COURSE. I'm glad that you're happy out there! Let me know if you're going to be in town over the summer, I WANT TO FINALLY MEET YOUR BOYFRIEND! Love you!

Sincerely,

Carly Milgram

To: kingsteve01@aol.com
From: dghenderson@hawkinsms.edu
05/12/1999 9:33pm

Subject: Do or Do Not, There is No Try

Are you still coming back out here so we can see The Phantom Menace together?

Dustin G Henderson

'The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.' -- Albert Einstein

To: dghenderson@hawkinsms.edu
From: kingsteve01@aol.com

05/13/1999 5:46pm

Subject: Re: Do or Do Not, There is No Try

Dustin,

What kind of stupid question is that? You're paying for the tickets.

To: Billy Hargrove & Steve Harrington
2190 Shore Dr
Camano Island WA 98282
July 9th, 1999

Hey Steve! I'm addressing this letter to both of you but I bet you'll be the first one to read it. Thanks so much for having me and Tim out there over 4th of July, I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GUYS HAVE A HOUSE! You're so close to the beach that you can practically walk out of your backyard and into the ocean. Sorry for you but I think you're my new vacation spot.

It was so great to see everyone, I'm still a little buzzed from it. It felt like old times. I'm so happy for you and Billy, kinda like a fairy tale right? Don't roll your eyes at me Harrington.

I miss you already! I know you said that you guys might come back to Indiana before summer's over, let me know when you're in town and I'll fly out. And send me your email again please, I want some of the pictures that Billy took!

Love you both,

Ali

PS. Did you guys really know that Timmy had a thing for me all this time? THANKS FOR TELLING ME, NINE YEARS LATER!!!!

master of puppets 68 has signed on (6:02 pm).
King Steve 01: Hey

King Steve 01: Are you at the comp?

master of puppets 68: yea hi

King Steve 01: Did I sign out of my account this morning? Dont snoop!

master of puppets 68: what u dont want me to see ur cabana boys

King Steve 01: Oh my god it was ONE TIME

King Steve 01: I didn't mean to click on that!!!!

master of puppets 68: sure

master of puppets 68: u perv

King Steve 01: I'm serious did I sign off?

master of puppets 68: maybe

master of puppets 68: why? something u dont want me to see

King Steve 01: No, I'm just asking

King Steve 01: I have work stuff on there

master of puppets 68: ok

master of puppets 68: u getting me a present

King Steve 01: no

master of puppets 68: maybe a ring or something?

King Steve 01: Shit Billy are you serious. You weren't supposed to see that.

King Steve 01: I didn't want you to know about it!

master of puppets 68: HAHAAHAHAHA

master of puppets 68: i was joking u shit

master of puppets 68: now i know

master of puppets 68: ur really smooth

King Steve 01: Oh my god. You fucking asshole.

master of puppets 68: i like silver

King Steve 01: You are the most annoying man. How did you know?

master of puppets 68: i didnt see shit, i dont know your password

master of puppets 68: u looked at rings 4 10 minutes last week at the mall

King Steve 01: Oh right. Do you really want it?

master of puppets 68: if udon't make a big thing out of it

King Steve 01: :-)

King Steve 01: I never do that :-)

master of puppets 68: right

King Steve 01: well I still have to order it

King Steve 01: You better be nice to me

master of puppets 68: i'm always nice

King Steve 01: Hm. Debatable.

King Steve 01: So what are you doing if you aren't snooping in my stuff? Playing pinball?

master of puppets 68: no asshole. Im doing research

King Steve 01: What research

master of puppets 68: arent u coming home

King Steve 01: I am! Soon!

master of puppets 68: thought u wanted to watch buffy the vampire slayer

King Steve 01: Haha, it took you so long to type that

master of puppets 68: fuck u

master of puppets 68: i'm looking at baby stuff

King Steve 01:

King Steve 01:what? Why?

master of puppets 68: because i want a baby

King Steve 01:What

King Steve 01: Are you joking

master of puppets 68: HAHA! you shit

master of puppets 68: MAX IS HAVIN A BABY!!!!

King Steve 01: What! Are you serious!

King Steve 01: that's awesome!

master of puppets 68: yah she just told me

master of puppets 68: think she's kinda scared

master of puppets 68: she wants to come out here again for a while

King Steve 01: Oh she can come out here! She can stay with us!

King Steve 01: Whatever she wants, we can talk about it

master of puppets 68: said i'd tell you

King Steve 01: :-) When is she due?

master of puppets 68: december

King Steve 01: Awwww a Christmas baby :-)

master of puppets 68: guess so

King Steve 01: I can't believe it

King Steve 01: Am I allowed to ask who the dad is?

master of puppets 68: who do you think

King Steve 01: Ugh no

King Steve 01: Loser mcfuckface?

Master of puppets 68: bingo

King Steve 01: Jesus christ

King Steve 01: Ok well. She's definitely coming here.

master of puppets 68: fucking right

master of puppets 68: talk abt it later, call her

master of puppets 68: come home and fuck me

King Steve 01: Oh is that what you want?

master of puppets 68: yea

King Steve 01: Hmm. I thought this morning you wanted to blow me.

master of puppets 68: blow then fuck

master of puppets 68: come on

King Steve 01: You're so romantic.

King Steve 01: What about Buffy?

master of puppets 68: jesus christ. hurry up

King Steve 01: Ok I'm leaving now. I love you.

master of puppets 68: love u too

King Steve 01 has signed off (6:44pm).

master of puppets 68 has signed off (6:44pm).

~THE END~